

IDLE TALES.

MRS. RIDDELL.







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BY



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AUTHOR OF

“GEORGE GEITH,” “THE NUN’S CURSE,” ETC.

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TO

MRS. WHITTLE,

IN REMEMBRANCE OF MANY HAPPY DAYS SPENT BY THE

AUTHOR LONG AGO AT

LARCHMOUNT, Co. LONDONDERRY.

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IDLE TALES.



THE RUN ON CONNELL'S BANK.

THIS was how it came about. On a Fair Day in November, more than fifty years ago, there stood at the private door of our branch in Tyrnane a sturdy beggar, hatless, stockingless, clad only in a pair of ragged trousers, and an even raggeder shirt, “cursing at large.”

Those were the pleasant days of old when it was accounted not a weakness, but a merit, to provide an army of able-bodied, lazy, dirty, impudent vagabonds of both sexes with the means of subsistence for which they neither did nor would do any work. Not merely did each town and village boast its own peculiar beggars, who were as well known and considered as the clergyman, but itinerant professors of the art perambulated the country asking for alms, and almost

always receiving them. The poorhouse had not then taken the place of “the mercies of God,” as mendicants piously called such benefactions, and paupers considered they had as good a right to levy a rate from high and low as impecunious persons at the present day feel they have to parish relief.

Few indeed at that time failed to pay the tax exacted. Coppers, broken victuals, old clothing, uncooked potatoes, a handful of raw meal, nothing came amiss to the resident or travelling mendicant, who, when repulsed by a servant, was apt to ask, “Does your mistress do nothing for her soul?” and supplement his artless inquiry with a torrent of that profane invective in which the Irish peasant is a proficient.

Mrs. Grant’s rosy-cheeked housemaid often had run the gauntlet of vagrant indignation. Under the pain of instant dismissal she dared neither to give of her master’s goods nor her own. Mr. Grant, our manager, a Scotchman and a Calvinist, viewed the whole system of benefactions as a survival of Popery—“trying to buy Heaven,” so he declared.

He was a hard man, according to the popular verdict. He must have been brave as well, for

it needs some courage to try to stem single-handed the public opinion of a whole town. Yet he did not set his face against all charity. There were widows and orphans his wife and daughter visited in their affliction, taking to the house of death help more substantial than kindly words; to the honest poor he was not hard either, but for the tramp of the period he had no toleration.

He would have clapped all such beggars in the stocks, or seen them flogged at the cart's tail with complacency. Judge, then, how little these pests loved Mr. Grant, and how often the sound of reviling was heard outside his doors.

I chanced to be returning from some errand on that fair day when the sturdy vagrant was delivering his diatribe. "You and your rotten old bank," I heard him say as I passed in, "you that can't spare a penny for a poor man; it won't be long before you smash up, and a good job too! All the lot of you will break before long, and then we'll be rid of your dirty notes that you cheat honest people with, pretending they are worth money, and them scarcely fit to light a pipe," and so, with the addition of many curses and much foul language, he shuffled away among the stalls, and we saw him no more. In

five minutes I had forgotten all about the vagabond.

That was a busy day with us, as many of the farmers took advantage of coming into town to pay in and draw out money. Even Mr. Grant, who generally held himself aloof from the vulgar details of banking, was forced, more than once, to cash a cheque and exchange friendly greetings with the man who presented it. Ours was an old bank, one that held on the even tenor of its way while many a more highly considered concern tottered and fell.

Our headquarters were in Dublin, but we had branches all over Ireland. The Connells themselves were on terms of friendly intimacy with the “best in the country.” Noblemen kept their accounts with us. Agents paid in the rents and remitted through “Connells” to many an extravagant absentee. We were nothing if not respectable. Our clerks had poor salaries because “we stood so well.” It was considered a good thing to be even a porter in Connells, and less influence had to be exerted to get a son a post under Government than to plant him in the banking house of Messrs. Theophilus, Conway, and Latimer Connell.

Thus we all had a sense of deep responsibility; we were soldiers in a regiment which was bound to serve Connells' loyally and protect it faithfully.

The dull November day wore on, and it was drawing close to three o'clock when an old woman whom we knew well as the owner of a small huckster's shop in the outskirts of the town, came up to the counter. As it happened, it was Mr. Grant who answered her greeting with "Well, Mrs. Kane, and what can we do for you?"

"Ah! the Lord bless your honour," she answered, "I don't want much—only gold, if you please, for these few notes." So saying, she laid down a small roll, so greasy and dirty that it looked as if she had kept it for a year up her chimney.

Mr. Grant opened the roll without answering a word. This was a request which always annoyed him, even when people were going to England, and obliged to get gold before their departure.

"We can't be changing other banks' notes," he said, brusquely pushing the little bundle back across the counter. "If once we began that we might do nothing else."

At the best of times he had a way of being somewhat short, and his manner certainly was very short to Mrs. Kane.

She stood for a moment as if nonplussed. Then she said, "But Mr. Grant, dear, I'd have to travel twenty long miles to get them turned into gold."

"I can't help that," he retorted. "If you like to take Morrison's notes you must put up with the inconvenience."

"I'm a lone widow," she pleaded, humbly, "with a big, small family, and what would become of me at all if Morrison broke?"

"Bosh!" answered Mr. Grant; "Morrison's is as safe as the Bank of Ireland."

"May be," ejaculated Mrs. Kane; "may be;" and she stood considering, while Mr. Grant made a few entries, after which he attended to a gentleman who came on the, to Connells', pleasant business of paying in a large sum of money.

But his appearance did not much gratify Mr. Grant. He was a gentleman farmer in the neighbourhood, he belonged to an old family, he moved in a very good rank, and he was what every mother in Tyrnane would have considered an excellent match.

Our manager, however, had his own opinions on that point as well as on the subject of beggars. He did not want young Lyle dangling

after *his* daughter. Let him marry some wife as foolish, flighty, and careless as himself. He never would make a well-brought-up girl like Helen Grant happy—hunting, shooting, billiard playing, dancing, drinking—that was the sure way to waste his health and substance and bring a family to want and disgrace. Helen should have none of him. So the edict went forth, and Robert Lyle was forbidden the house, and Miss Grant grew paler and quieter than ever. She had always been somewhat pale, and always gentle, but now there were people who said they did not like her look, that she more resembled a saint than a flesh-and-blood maiden.

All my sympathies were with the lovers. Well I knew how Mr. Lyle's sins were enlarged upon by the town gossips. There was not much harm in him. There was no harm, in fact. His faults were those of his age, temperament, and position. A good wife could, I felt sure, make what she would of him; but Mr. Grant wanted a man who was already made.

He hated all horses except when in harness; the music of the hounds was discord to him; he distrusted merriment, and music had no charms for his ear. So it came to pass that he looked

on Mr. Lyle with doubt, and received even his money coldly.

While the young man transacted the business which had brought him to the bank, Mrs. Kane stood silent, but after he went out she edged up again to the counter and waited till she caught our manager's eye.

“What is it now?” he asked.

“I beg your pardon, Mr. Grant, sir; but sure if Morrison's is as safe as you say, maybe you wouldn't mind changing these notes for your own. There's no fear of Connells' breaking, heaven prosper them!”

Mr. Grant took the roll with a gesture of impatience. “We'll do that for you,” he said, “but it is all nonsense, you know.”

“Well, well, it is, perhaps, your honour; but I'd be easier in my mind.”

He counted out the notes and handed them to her, remarking, “There, Mrs. Kane, I hope your mind will be quite easy now.”

“Thank you, sir,” but she did not move—instead she deliberately laid one of the notes out on the counter and read in a drawling monotone, “‘I promise—to—pay—the bearer on demand.’ Isn't that right, Mr. Grant?”

“Quite right,” he answered.

“Then I must just trouble you, sir——”

Mr. Grant did not give her time to finish the sentence. In a gust of rage he shovelled out enough gold to cash the notes he had just handed across the counter.

“Now be off,” he said, “and never let me see your face inside this bank again.”

“Indeed; and it’s not myself will be anxious ever to see the inside of any bank from this day. I haven’t too much opinion of them.” After firing which shot she put up her money in a bag she had brought for the purpose (the total amount was only six pounds), and retreated in good order.

As I made my way through the fair, after my work at the bank was ended, I heard sentences which at first vaguely surprised and then so greatly alarmed me, that instead of going straight home I made a round of the town, and heard enough to convince me there was trouble brewing for us on the morrow. Everyone knew that Morrison’s people had recently sustained a heavy loss through the failure of a large firm in the linen trade, but hitherto no one had ever dreamt of saying they were in difficulties.

Now, however, a rumour to this effect was flying among the country people, and our own bank was stated to be seriously involved with them.

It was all the work of one ragged, lying beggar, but the contradiction of an archbishop could not have arrested the mischief.

Though uncertain as to how Mr. Grant might receive such unpleasant news, my duty was clear—I must go back and tell him, and back accordingly I went.

The manager had but just finished dinner, and when I entered was sitting over his tumbler of hot punch.

“What is it, Cleery?” he asked.

It only took me a minute to explain what I had heard, and even while I was speaking Mr. Grant’s clear head grasped the danger which threatened us.

“They’ll have coin at Marshill,” he remarked, after a pause. “Yes, they are sure to have coin at Marshill.”

“Hadn’t I best go over there to-night, then?” I asked. “I could walk it in seven hours.”

It was twenty Irish miles away—twenty Irish miles good—five-and-twenty English—along a road

which lay up hill and down dale, across as waste and lonely a bit of country as was to be found in the North of Ireland; but I did not mind. I was young then, and active, and willing to do more than that for Connells' any day or night.

Mr. Grant thought for a short time, then he said, "No; it is too great a risk; we will need all hands here in the morning. Little is the only man who can help us. Go round and tell him what has happened—that roan of his can take him over to-night and bring us help back early to-morrow. Say we won't forget it to him."

Mr. Little, who had occasional difficulties in which he required Mr. Grant's assistance, proved quite agreeable to help us in our dilemma.

"The moon will be up by the time I am a mile or two on my road," he said, cheerfully, "and I have not had the horse out to-day. Tell Mr. Grant he'll see me in good time to-morrow."

Next morning we opened a few minutes before our usual hour, and soon had lots of work. Plenty of people kept coming in, but at first the rush did not mean any excessive call on our resources. We affected not to notice anything unusual in the number of persons who demanded

change for notes, and, whilst we did not dawdle over our business, we took care not to transact it with indecent haste. As time wore on, however, matters became more serious—the rush decreased, but the strain became more severe, the sums required grew in magnitude, and more than once Mr. Grant looked over at me with an expression which I knew meant, “I hope Little won’t be long.” No two hours in my life ever stretched to such a length as those which passed that day between ten and twelve. My ears felt literally cracking with the strain of listening through the hum of voices for the sound of Mr. Little’s roan. What had happened—what could have happened to detain him? Was there a run also at Marshill? Had they no coin to spare? Had they sent on to the next town? Would Little never come?

As the minute-hand crept on to half-past twelve Mr. Grant’s face grew ashy pale with anxiety. Mechanically we kept counting out money, though we could scarcely have told what we were doing. We knew we could not hold on much longer; we grew slower and slower in our movements; our hands seemed to be numbed; the evil moment was drawing nearer and nearer,

when Mr. Lyle, dressed out in hunting costume—scarlet coat, top boots, velvet cap, spurs, and whip—clattered into the bank.

Mr. Grant looked across the counter. “Have you come for money?” he asked, in a voice which he could not quite steady.

“I!” repeated the other; “bless you, no! I don’t want any money. I only turned in to know what the row is about.”

“There is a run on the bank—that is what the row is about,” answered Mr. Grant. “I knew it was impending, and sent over to Marshill for coin. We shall have plenty and to spare immediately.”

“It was a good notion,” said Mr. Lyle. “So this is a run. I never saw one of this kind before, and I should not have seen it now if we had found this morning. You seem busy. Can I help you?”

Mr. Grant took no notice of this question, but I made Mr. Lyle a sign. A sudden notion had come into my head. It was a wild one, but in such a strait as ours people catch at straws. He came up to where I was standing, and waited, as if watching the humours of a run. I seized a chance, and wrote on a slip of a paper, “Little

ought to have been back from Marshill two hours ago. Can you ride and meet him?"

He nodded and went out. Next instant I heard his hunter's hoofs clattering over the stones. Mr. Grant heard the sound too, but he did not look at me or I at him.

The remainder of that afternoon returns to me like a delirious dream. Except heating the money, we resorted to every approved method for gaining time. One of the local shopkeepers gave us loyal help by sending round a barrel filled with halfpence. When it arrived we were paying in sixpences. Then we knocked out the head and began doling out coppers. The crowd was dense round the door. People could scarcely find their way in or out. The noise was deafening, the excitement becoming dangerous; yet, through all, we went stolidly on counting out halfpence. If we could only hold out till the stroke of three there was hope. Assistance must come before morning, but could we, even by giving change for notes in halfpence, hope to hold out for another thirty minutes? Already we could see the bottom of the cask showing bare and bald through the scattered coppers which were all that remained, and here was a

man elbowing his way up to the counter who would not take his money in that form, as the ignorant country folks were glad to do. Yes, our time had come, we saw it in his determined face, in the steady determination with which he thrust other men aside, in the manner he began, “I am in a hurry, Mr. Grant, and will thank you to attend to me——”

He had got so far when he stopped short. There was a clatter in the street as if an artillery waggon were coming down it at full gallop. A roar of laughter rent the air, and then a hip! hip! hurrah! in which all the crowd gathered outside seemed to join.

I was counting out twelve halfpennies at the time, yet I could not resist turning my head to see what could have caused such a commotion. I do not know why I looked, for if the King had been passing through the town at that moment I should scarce have raised my eyes.

The laughter grew louder and the cheering too. The noise was deafening; whatever the vehicle, it must be near at hand.

With a rush and a rattle it came sweeping on, then stopped in front of our door—the strangest sight I ever beheld.

On a low-backed car, over which was spread a feather bed, in its turn covered with a patch-work quilt, squatted Mr. Little, pallid, hatless, and dishevelled, hugging three small square deal boxes with the energy of despair, while a countryman, his wife, and two children, also seated on the bed, were holding on to the car for dear life.

All the passengers, indeed, seemed to have been having a rough time of it. They were tossed, torn, and crumpled, though, with the exception of Mr. Little, apparently in good spirits, for they echoed the cheering vigorously, and responded to the greetings of the crowd with the air of conquerors.

A shaggy colt, which had never till that day felt harness, was in the shafts, whilst in front, unicorn fashion reversed, Mr. Little's good roan and Mr. Lyle's hunter were "showing the way," urged on by Mr. Lyle, who, mounted on his own steed, was acting as postillion.

I repeat, I never saw such a sight. As the flash of his red coat crossed my tired eyes, as the jubilant crack of his hunting-whip saluted my ears, it was on earth as a vision of heaven.

"Hip, hip, hurrah!" shouted the people. For

my part, in the bank I could have dropped on my knees and thanked God.

“Lend a hand here, boys,” cried Mr. Lyle, and in a trice the long-expected relief, the “coin,” was inside.

“I found Little on the hill-top, with a broken axle, cursing his day,” said Mr. Lyle, in cheerful explanation. “Never before saw a fellow in such a state. Did not feel much happier myself, for, though we had men and horses, we were in a quandary. Just in the nick of time Mr. Doolan and his low-backed car came along, so we explained the difficulty to him, and harnessed our horses in front of his, and here we are.”

“How much have you brought?” asked Mr. Grant.

“Twenty thousand; and you can have as much more as you like to ask for.”

“What can I do for *you*, Mr. Anderson?” said our manager, turning to the gentleman who, before this interruption, had said he was in a hurry.

“Thank you, Mr. Grant, but as you are so busy I think I will call in another day,” answered Mr. Anderson.

So ended the run on Connells’ Bank. Without opening any one of the three boxes containing

that twenty thousand pounds, confidence was restored—the plague of distrust was laid.

What a meal we all had that evening!

Mr. Grant would not let one of us go away. We were laughing and well-nigh crying while we laughed. The rosy-cheeked maid waited upon us, and in her heart, I know, hoped “it would be a lesson to master not to turn away beggars in a hurry again.”

Mr. Little never left his bed for a fortnight. He had suffered so much misery on the top of Tyrnane Hill while he stood beside his shattered gig, looking at the waste of bog which lay to right and left, waiting for help he thought would never come, afraid to leave the gold and go in search of assistance, conjuring up the scenes that might be enacting in the town, that he narrowly escaped brain fever, but at length he rallied sufficiently to send in his account, the items of which were as follows:—

		£	s.	d.
To my time	...	10	0	0
Repair of gig	...	3	15	0
Damage to roan horse				
caused by furious				
driving	...	5	4	0

		£	s.	d.
Vet.'s bill	...	1	1	0
Distress of mind while I was wrecked on				
Tyrnane Hill	...	20	0	0
Being bumped black and blue on Doolan's low-backed car, hold- ing the gold for bare life	...	3	8	0
Doctor Geary's bill	...	1	12	0
Sundries	...	5	16	2
<hr/>				
		50	16	2

Mr. Grant winced a little when he saw the sum total, but Connells' paid it without a murmur.

As for Mr. Lyle, he sent in no account, though his horse had been bitten by the colt and kicked by the roan. He came in and out, but said nothing about any sort of payment for his share in the proceedings till December was more than half through. Then he must have spoken to Mr. Grant on the subject nearest his heart, for I happened to hear this—

“I'll give up the billiards, sir, but I really

don't think you could ask me to sell one of my hunters, at any rate, after *that day's* run."

"There, there, there," said Mr. Grant, with wonderful good humour; "only be steady, boy, and we'll talk about all this next year. Meantime, though we Scotch don't make much of Christmas Day, come and eat your dinner with us on the 25th. I'll be glad to see you, and my wife the same, and, I'm thinking, Helen too."



ONLY A LOST LETTER.

“THEN I shall hear from you?”

“Yes, one way or other. If it rested with me the matter might be settled now, but there are others to consult who may not be of my way of thinking. I *believe*, however, we shall want you; I hope we shall.”

“And whether you do or not, I shall never forget your kindness.”

“Pray do not speak of that. I only wish I could have proved of real service, though perhaps, hereafter—”

“Good-bye,” she said, as he hesitated, scarcely knowing how to finish the sentence he had incautiously begun, a sentence intended to prophesy great things which might never come to pass.

“Good morning,” he answered, amending her expression. “You may depend upon hearing from me within the week,” and for an instant her hand lay in his hand, and her trustful eyes looked up into his face.

“Thank you,” she said softly; “you are very, very kind.” And then she was gone. The chair she had occupied stood empty. A subtle sense of womanhood had departed from out the room. Adown the staircase—the old dark dingy staircase—a slight girlish figure had flitted, shrinking nervously from contact with those she met; and the editor, who had elicited such unwonted expressions of gratitude, was left alone to consider the position.

“She certainly is *very* clever, poor little thing,” he decided; “but Hammond won’t like it, that is quite certain. However, I shall do all I can for her. What a tiny creature it is, and yet how self-reliant! I wish Hammond could have seen her. He must have accepted her story.”

Which was, indeed, the very thing Mr. Hammond would not have done. Had he seen this pale-faced shabbily-dressed Bessie Dunlow he would have said, without the slightest hesitation,

“It is of no use your bringing stories here; we have too many of them;” and if the girl had proved persistent, as even the most timid of women will on behalf of their brain-children, he might have gone so far as to remark,

“You can leave your manuscript if you like,

but I tell you candidly I do not see the slightest chance of our accepting it."

Authors were to be found who, even in the face of such discouragement, elected to leave their manuscripts, feeling confident that, although Mr. Hammond might have rejected nine hundred and ninety-nine novels, essays, or poems, their novel, essay or poem would prove the one exception in the thousand.

When such a case occurred Mr. Hammond's mode of dealing with the difficulty was simple in the extreme.

"Jones," he would say, addressing a meek-looking clerk who sat in an outer office, and usually occupied himself in directing envelopes and wrappers, a mode of passing time, which, if useful, is somewhat apt to prove stupefying, "Jones, just take this manuscript, and direct it to the address you will find enclosed. The day after to-morrow you can post it, together with a civil note, saying the 'editor regrets,' and so forth. And Jones—"

"Yes, sir."

"If the lady should call again, do not let her in on any account."

"Very good, sir."

“I am sure no one can consider the feelings of authors more than I do,” Mr. Hammond would then remark to his editor, Mr. Kilham, who, in the course of an experience extending over many years, had learned the great beauty and usefulness of silence.

Mr. Hammond had been, and indeed still was, a wholesale stationer in a tolerably safe way of business.

He did not manufacture paper himself, but he sold the goods of those who did; and, as his father had been engaged in the same branch of trade before him, Mr. Hammond’s lines were thrown, as he vaguely phrased it, “less or more among literary people all his life.”

According to his reading of the word “literary,” he was quite correct. Any person who was connected directly or indirectly with the production of a book was one of the guild.

Paper-makers, paper-sellers, bookbinders, wood-engravers, printers—ay, even the printers’ devils—black, saucy, and irrepressible—were all, in his estimation, members of one great army. Those he reckoned as the lowest of the rank and file were the men who provided employment for all the others.

Upon authors Mr. Hammond looked down with a naïve wholesome and refreshing contempt too genuine ever to prove offensive.

“It is the only calling,” he was wont to observe, “upon which a man can enter without previous knowledge, training, or capital. A quire of paper, a pennyworth of ink, another pennyworth of pens! Why, there is not a coster in London who could set up in business with so small a stock. That is what brings such a lot of incapables into the trade. A fellow who can’t do a simple sum in addition rushes into poetry; a woman who can’t make a pudding is perfectly sure she is able to write. If a girl wants a new dress; if a curate finds his butcher pressing; if a lad desires to shirk business; if a widow is left with a large family and small means—he or she at once takes pen in hand and ‘dashes off’—that is the expression—dashes off a little something it is quite certain will ‘prove suitable.’ No; you need not talk to me about successful authors. If they had only turned their attention to some legitimate business, they would have been far more prosperous. I have never known an author who was easy about money matters unless his father did well before him, and left some sub-

stantial grist for the household mill behind. Just look at my editor, Mr. Kilham ; he is a case in point, if ever there was one. A man of good family, well educated, successful at Oxford—why, he started with everything in his favour ! His uncle wanted him to take Orders, and would have given him an income, and eventually a living ; but no, he had ‘conscientious scruples ;’ he did not ‘think he was fit to be a clergyman ;’ he had some objection to signing one of the Thirty-nine Articles, so he quarrelled with his friends, and came to London to try his fortune at authorship. Well, he has tried his fortune, and what is the result ? He is only too glad to come to me at a salary of two hundred and fifty pounds a year. Of course he makes something by his writing, but if you put the whole down at five hundred, I fancy you will be a little over the mark. Now do you call that success ? Why, he might have been a bishop by now, if he had only followed his uncle’s advice ! ”

“ But then, you see, I might not,” Mr. Kilham sometimes answered, when such a remark was made to him. “ After all, the profession of bishop is a very close borough.”

“ Pooh, sir ! don’t tell me ! ” Mr. Hammond

would rejoin. "All the better for you if you had selected a calling closed against Dick, Tom, and Harry; miss in her teens and grandmother in her dotage. With all your cleverness, Kilham, I must say I think you know very little of the world."

Mr. Hammond was quite right. Mr. Kilham—"my editor," the captive of his bow and spear, the "point" of his moral raids against authorship, the "adornment" of tales meant to prove that literature could only be regarded as a very poor and trashy calling—knew very little indeed of the world, or he would never for a moment have imagined that Bessie Dunlow's face, voice, and manner were likely to impress his principal with the slightest idea of talent.

No one could have accused Mr. Hammond of having quiet tastes. When he took his holiday he always went to some town crammed full of visitors of the same turn of mind as himself. His house was a blaze of colour; his children were brought up to be prodigies of forwardness and knowledge; his horses lifted their feet higher than other horses; and his wife, a large handsome woman, invariably wore bright dresses and a considerable amount of jewelry.

It was always the “loudest” thing of the season, in which Mr. Hammond believed.

The most startling picture, the most sensational book, the noisiest music, the most talked-about singer—if ever a writer received a long notice and glowing critique, that was the writer for whom his soul longed.

“We don’t *make* authors here, sir,” he said one day pompously, to one who confessed that, as yet, the world was ignorant of the genius it contained in his own person. “We don’t make authors here, sir; but when they are made we are very glad to see them.”

“Made” authors, however, were not always so glad to see Mr. Hammond, who had an objection to remunerating them according to what they considered their deserts.

This was one of the difficulties Mr. Kilham had to contend against in his endeavours to make the magazine a success. That he had made it one was owing almost entirely to his own standing in the world of letters, and to a gentleness of manner which acted as an admirable buffer between Mr. Hammond and the contributors.

It is only fair, however, to state that Mr. Hammond did not share this opinion.

“If it were not for me,” he said, “my magazine would soon be as poor a property as it was when it came into my hands.”

He had held a mortgage over it in the time of the previous proprietor; and when that individual’s affairs went into bankruptcy determined to see whether he could not make it pay.

“There is nothing like management,” he delighted to assert. “Everything in this world is management—the whole difference between success and failure is management.”

Like many another indirect self-praiser, Mr. Hammond forgot or ignored the fact that he had begun his management with a good business and a satisfactory balance at his bankers; whereas Mr. Kilham and others, who were not admirable administrators of their own, were forced to commence and wage the battle of existence destitute of such adventitious aids.

Bessie Dunlow would, in Mr. Hammond’s eyes, have seemed merely a mistake. Young persons shabbily attired, and who looked as if they had never partaken of a sufficient meal, were out of his line entirely. Thick silks, good furs, stylish bonnets, well-made boots, well-fitting gloves—that was the “proper sort of thing for a lady;” and

Mr. Hammond would no more have dreamt of calling poor Bessie—in her best stuff dress, her modest hat, her cheap poor jacket—a lady than he would his own cook.

Nay, in his estimation, the cook would have ranked higher—she, at all events, was a good manager; but as for Bessie, of course it was all for lack of his favourite quality that she failed to present the appearance which might have won favour in the eyes of most men.

Such as she was, however, she had found favour in the sight of Mr. Kilham. She reminded him of a young sister who had, for many a sorrowful year, been sleeping safely and quietly under the green turf in a certain churchyard far away. There was a look in her face, also, that recalled a girl, remembered even in his middle age with an aching pain at his heart, who had been forced to marry against her will, and who died before she was twenty.

Further, she was a desolate little creature—desolate, though she had mother and brothers and sisters; and, moreover, she was gifted with that fatal dower, genius; and who should know better than Mr. Kilham what fortune that was likely to bring with it?

Her heart had fluttered out to him, and even at their first interview he gleaned all about her—all, that is to say, save the name of the remote village whence she travelled alone to London.

“I wrote to editors and publishers till I was tired,” she explained; “so I thought I would come and see them.”

That was it. She had saved and saved till the tiny purse held enough to enable her to adventure up to London. All the year she taught—she had been teaching ever since she was fifteen. All the money she could make in that way was needed, because her mother was delicate, her income small, the boys at school, her little sisters young.

Between the lines Mr. Kilham could read the simple pitiful story. Though Bessie only touched the features of her mother’s character with the tenderest affection, this man, who had seen so much of human nature, understood Mrs. Dunglew’s character as well as if he had been acquainted with it for years.

Weak, vain, selfish, unadaptable, proud of her sons and indulgent to them, fond of her daughter, but not considerate, as the father, had he lived, must have proved.

Over-worked, over-weighted—a gentleman not merely by birth, but in every instinct of his nature; honest and honourable; resolute to perform each duty as it came; a fond husband, a tender father, a true Christian, which last phrase, indeed, if we could always understand it aright, includes every excellent trait that so many words are often expended in endeavouring to express; ah! well, though the grief was old in so short a life as Bessie's, Mr. Kilham comprehended the wound inflicted by her father's death was still unhealed, when he saw the girl's eyes full of unshed tears—of tears she was resolute not to shed, as she spoke of how badly off they had been left, of what a struggle her mother found it to make all ends meet, even with what she, Bessie, could contribute to the common fund.

“So I thought,” finished the little maiden, who would, in Mr. Hammond's eyes, have seemed of so little account, “that if I were able to earn anything by my writing—even twenty pounds a year—it would make all the difference.”

All the difference! Mr. Kilham heard that part of the sentence distinctly—saw the pale, anxious, pleading face, the soft hazel eyes, the

hands unconsciously clasped on his table—and determined to speak, paradoxical as the phrase may seem, severely, out of mercy.

“The question is, my dear,” he said, and there was nothing offensive in the words “my dear” as he spoke them—half a century seemed to separate the two, he looked so much older than he was, and she so much younger—“are you able to write? Whether the opinion be right or wrong, of course I am not prepared to say; but the general opinion is that ladies so young as you cannot have sufficient knowledge of the world to enable them to produce a story really worth reading.”

It was curious to see how, in a second, the girl’s cowardice changed into strength. She did not argue the point. She never thought of fencing with his statement.

“I can write, sir,” she said. “I know I can write. If you will only look at my manuscript, you will say the same;” and she stretched out the manuscript, which the editor, still unbelieving, and against all his convictions, permitted her to leave in his hands.

“I will write to you,” he said.

“Thank you. But will you promise me to read it?”

“You may depend upon my doing so.”

And then she went. Something, quite inexplicable to the editor, seemed to go with her. Something as intangible to mental analysis as the passing fragrance of a violet would be in any actual crucible. Plenty of women had one time and another sat in the editor’s office—women drawn from many ranks—women possessed of various individualities; and amongst such a number one more might well have seemed a very insignificant item.

Beauties and celebrities—ladies of high social standing; ladies who understood the art of dressing; ladies who were adepts at persuasion—all these and many more had come and gone, and impressed the editor, little or much, as the case might be; but Bessie Dunlow was the only one who had taken his fancy.

I use the phrase in no love sense. The interest he felt in her, the something he missed when she departed, had no touch of passion mingling.

His sentiment towards the girl was that of kindly pity—of admiring respect. She was so

feminine and yet so strong, so timid and yet so brave, so fragile and yet so full of energy, so sensible and yet so blind to the harshness of her lot; so grieved mother and brothers and sisters were destitute of many things good and desirable, so glad she was the eldest of the family and able to help, even though her help brought in but little.

As in the gloom of a winter afternoon in London he leaned back in his chair and thought about the burden this child—for to him she seemed little more — had undertaken and was carrying quite contentedly, Mr. Kilham found his fancy following her about her daily avocations.

In the bright winter mornings, when snow lay upon the ground, he could picture her walking along the country lanes to the houses where she taught. He could see her amongst her brothers and sisters making all things smoother for the delicate querulous mother, pouring out the tea, toasting the bread, stitching away in the evenings, opening her little budget of news for the amusement of the circle, copying out the parts for the choir, running off to the church for Saturday evening

practice, playing the organ on Sundays (for a year past she had added to her mother's income by taking the post of organist ; “the rector has been *so* good to me,” she added), and, in a word, doing whatever her hands and her head found to do—this was the girl-woman he felt he could never quite forget, who had unconsciously shown him what a loving daughter and an affectionate sister could compass in her own person.

Domestically, Mr. Kilham was not fortunately situated. He had a delicate wife, who spent such portion of her existence as was not passed in society, in bemoaning the evil fate which linked her fortune with that of a man who was “a mere literary drudge ;” he had little pleasure in his children, who were brought up by their mother to consider the best he, poor hack, could achieve—a very poor best indeed.

Here, then, was the other side of the shield presented for his view.

No man strong to labour—no male going forth to his work in the morning and returning to his rest at night—but a young girl, always turning her energies to account, weekday and Sunday doing something for those she loved, thankful to God, faithful to the helpless

creatures He seemed to have confided to her care, untiring as regarded the task set her.

“And shall I murmur?” thought Mr. Kilham, contrasting his own position with that of Bessie Dunlow.

It grieves the chronicler of this little story to be obliged to state that, spite his inquiry, Mr. Kilham did murmur at the idea of having to read Bessie Dunlow’s manuscript.

Had she told him she could sing, play, dance, make pastry, cut out a dress, he would have believed her; but he really could not credit that the little creature who seemed so small in every way—the pleading, modest, retiring little girl—possessed the smallest capacity for writing.

“It is some foolish love story, no doubt,” decided Mr. Kilham, as with a heavy sigh he cut the string that held together many sheets of paper.

CHAPTER II.

STILL Mr. Kilham read on, and it was not a foolish love story which he perused.

“She made no mistake; she can write, and

write well," he said to himself, and then he turned back to the first page and read it all over again.

When he had finished his second perusal (the tale was short and the hand legible) he laid down the manuscript and thought.

"She ought to make her mark," thus ran his soliloquy. "I wish I could give her the shove from shore; but I do not see how I can make an opening. Hammond would not like it. He never believes in new people—as if old writers must not have been new some time; and he hates all stories that end badly—says there is enough misery in real life, and so forth; though for my part I do not believe he knows anything about the matter. Funny sort of tale for a timid little creature like that to write, too! Wonder how she evolved it? Could not have been all out of her imagination."

Two days later, Miss Dunlow was once again seated opposite the editor.

He had told her simply he believed she possessed genius, that he thought she ought to achieve great things, but at the same time he warned her of the difficulties she would have to encounter, and said, just in so many words.

“The road to success is not bordered with flowers.”

For answer, she said,

“I do not fear the difficulties I may have to encounter and overcome.”

“Ah! it is less in what you may meet than in all you must leave behind that the sorrow lies.”

“Each day we leave something behind,” she answered bravely;—“even those who never gain, certainly lose.”

Mr. Kilham made no direct reply. He remained for a moment silent, then said abruptly,

“Where did you get your incidents? They never formed part and parcel of your own life, I am quite sure.”

“No. They did not in the way you mean; and yet they have almost formed part and parcel of my life, for all that.”

Bit by bit he drew the story from her. How in her holidays, or in what should have been her holidays, she “kept up” the music of the younger members of the family at the Great House, where she came and went as she chose.

“They are all so kind to me,” said the brave little maiden. “O, you cannot imagine how kind they are—even wanting me to dine and spend

the evening, and go to picnics with them; and seeming quite vexed when I refuse."

"And why do you refuse, little maiden?" asked the editor, having, perhaps, upon his brain those stories which find favour in the eyes of young ladies, relating to girls in like case with Bessie Dunlow, who made wonderful conquests.

"Why do I refuse?" echoed Bessie, who, poor soul, was practical in every detail of her life. "O, Mr. Kilham, cannot you understand? The people who ask me are rich, and gay, and fashionable. Where should I get dress which would be suitable to wear among ladies who have never had to consider money in all their lives? How could I spare time to go pleasuring, when the day is scarcely long enough for the work I have to do in it? How could I leave my mother and the boys, who have not a change from one year's end to another, and enjoy myself while they were wanting me at home?"

"I am sure, my dear, I cannot answer your questions," answered Mr. Kilham with an amused smile, under which there lay a trace of sadness also. "What you say seems very right and sensible, but yet I am constantly receiving manuscripts in which the heroines—girls situated for

the most part just as you are situated—walk out to achieve success, clothed only in white muslin and innocence. They all marry rich commoners, or baronets at the least; book muslin invariably has the best of the battle against velvet."

"I know the stories you mean," remarked Bessie, laughing; "in them the governess is preferred to the pupil, and often the maid to the mistress. But you cannot think such tales are founded upon observation. In real life, I fancy gentleman visitors scarcely remember there is a governess in the house."

"At the Hall, where you 'keep up' the children's music when the family comes down from London, you must have managed to observe one of the gentleman visitors pretty closely, I should say."

Bessie looked troubled, but she did not blush. "Yes," she answered, "I could not help it—I have been so much with them—him and her, I mean." Here she lightly touched her manuscript. "I have seen it all. I know how she tries him, though she is so good to every one else. I know how much he has borne from her, and I am sure—O, I am sure as possible, that some day the story will end as I have written

it. He will go away, and then, when it is too late, she will know how fond she is of him."

" You think she is fond of him, then?"

" Certain. She is able to hide it from him, but she cannot hide it from me."

And thus they talked on for a little while ; and as in a mirror, she showed him artlessly and unconsciously the home wherein the coquettish beauty dwelt when she was not in London, or abroad, or taking her pleasure at some fashionable English watering-place.

With Bessie for guide, Mr. Kilham walked adown shady alleys to the lake whereon swans sailed proudly ; he passed through conservatories filled with the rarest flowers ; he sauntered across the park, and rested under the branches of ancient trees ; he beheld the church, situated within the grounds, decked for Christmas ; and peeped into the cottages where gifts from the Hall had come.

And there was no jealousy, no heart-burning in this girl's description of the life led by another girl scarcely a year older than herself ; nothing in her own lot seemed to strike Bessie as hard. That one should be high and her fellow low was all a part and parcel of the scheme of creation, and Bessie had never even thought of amending it.

That she should go afoot and the beauty ride on horseback was an arrangement she did not seem to think might be altered with advantage. Here, on the one hand, was little Bessie Dunlow working hard, rising early, eating the bread of carefulness ; there, on the other hand, was the beautiful heroine of her story, with scarcely a crumpled rose-leaf to trouble her peace. And yet what the little teacher desired was not any of the luxuries surrounding the spoiled beauty, but only that her heroine should listen to the dictates of her own heart, and so, as Bessie said,

“ Make my story all untrue.”

“ You will have to change the ending of it,” commented Mr. Kilham, “ if I am even to try to do anything with it. My principal objects *in toto* to melancholy stories, and it would not be of the slightest use asking him to insert yours as it stands.”

But here arose an unexpected difficulty. Bessie — docile enough in most things — positively refused to remodel her story at the bidding of any proprietor on earth.

“ I should only spoil it,” she remarked. “ I will write you another if you like ; but I could not change that.”

Quite in vain Mr. Kilham remonstrated. Bessie was firm. The indifference or adaptability which comes, say, after twenty years of authorship, is rarely met with in a novice. At that moment, Miss Dunlow was possessed with something of a martyr's constancy. Her story might be rejected, but her story should not be altered ; and with a sigh that proved Mr. Kilham to be conversant with the ways of women and authors, he gave up the struggle.

“I will try my best for you,” he said, with a smile, “though you do slight my advice. If you are passing the day after to-morrow, I will tell you what the chances are.”

When Bessie called again, Mr. Kilham confessed the chances were about equal.

“I hope I shall be able to manage it for you,” he said ; “but I can promise nothing. Let me see, what is your address ? I will write to you.”

Without any knowledge of the utter unfashionableness of the neighbourhood where she was lodging, Bessie gave him the name of a very obscure street situate in a district where “nobody lived.”

“I shall only be there for a week,” she said

timidly. "I can only stay in London for another week."

Mr. Kilham looked in the girl's face, and understood the reason.

The slender hoard, so painfully gathered, so carefully husbanded, was wasting rapidly away.

"Had not you better return home at once," he said kindly, "and let me communicate with you there."

Like many other young people, the girl was, after a fashion, obstinate.

"No," she answered ; "for good or for evil, I have decided to abide by what I am able to do while in London. If I gain, I thank God. If I fail, I believe it to be His will."

Pregnant words, recalled afterwards by Mr Kilham with a wondering interrogation.

It was after them—after a pause—she spoke the sentence with which this story opens.

Adown the stream of memory there still often-times comes floating to the editor, now a man more than successful, the very look Bessie Dunlow's face wore as she stood in his office for the last time. He can see the earnest eyes, hear the soft pleading voice, feel the touch of the small delicate hand, and watch the slender figure

as the girl gifted with so much genius passes out of the room and flits down the gloomy staircase into the street.

“I wish Hammond were back,” said Mr. Kilham in conversation with himself, some three days later on. “Time is getting on, and I should not like to accept the story without his approval.”

For Mr. Kilham was not the autocratic editor most persons imagined.

He did not pooh-pooh the suggestions of his principal, and intimate if Mr. Hammond found the money that was all any one desired of him.

On the contrary, he deferred, perhaps unduly, to Mr. Hammond’s opinions. He was mild and meek, and anything in the shape of warfare with his chief would have been abhorrent to his nature. He never asserted himself, never insisted upon his rights. If occasionally he felt aggrieved, and disposed to throw up his appointment, there arose before him the vision of trades-people clamouring to be satisfied, of daughters asking for dress which could not be provided.

“A poor creature,” excepting for his learning, Mr. Hammond considered him; but spite of this opinion he was a gentleman in every habit

of his life, in every instinct of his nature, and, with a chivalry that was an integral part of his character, he desired to help Bessie Dunlow, who was indeed as distressed a heroine as ever existed in the pages of romance.

Days went by, and still Mr. Hammond did not return. It was the very last before the date Bessie had fixed for leaving London, and Mr. Kilham was as far from knowing the mind of his principal as ever.

“I will risk it,” he decided. “The tale shall appear. The story is a good one, and accepting it may, as the little girl says, ‘make all the difference’ to her. How I should like to see her face when she receives my letter!”

But Bessie never received the letter. It was lost in transit. What became of it who can tell? There are millions and millions of letters delivered safely, but sometimes there is one missing, one opened in the hope of finding an enclosure, one dropped by a drunken postman, one torn up for the sake of its stamp by a precociously wicked errand lad, one slipped in the folds of a magazine or newspaper, one mislaid by a careless servant—missing, at all events. Sometimes of importance, sometimes of none.

And the letter announcing to Bessie Dunlow the fruition of her hopes never reached her, and she waited, waited for its coming till hope was dead.

She stayed till the last minute in London. Stayed two days beyond the date she had intended. Pinching, saving, almost starving, she managed to give that two days' law, and defer her departure from the Thursday till the Saturday, and leave only in time to catch the last train home at night, so as to be able to appear at her post on the Sunday morning.

She had not money enough left to pay for a cab, or even for an omnibus. In her poor little purse there lay only her railway ticket and two-pence - halfpenny. Over the “stony - hearted streets” she walked, weak in body, crushed in mind.

She had thrown and lost, ventured her all upon this cast, and, behold, the game was over. As she rolled up her manuscripts and put them in the bottom of her bag, her soul was too sick for tears. That night—that Saturday night—as she trod the pavements, slippery from recent rain, as she passed the open doors of gin palaces, from out of which the gas flared brightly,

as, with head bent down, she moved sadly through the throng, turning a deaf ear to the blandishments of omnibus cads, and an unseeing eye on the men and women she met on her way, I do not think there was in the length and breadth of London a sadder heart than Bessie Dunlow's, full of sad hearts as the great Babylon always is.

Mr. Kilham waited, expecting to see her; but, as she failed to come, wrote once again.

This time the letter reached safely; but Bessie was gone.

When Mr. Kilham at last called at the lodging she had occupied he found his note stuck in the frame of the cheap mirror over the front-parlour chimneypiece; but there was no Bessie to read it.

The little servant, her face and hands smeared with black-lead, told him all she knew about the young lady's departure.

“She went away last Saturday night, sir; and a nasty night it was for her to be out. She would not have a cab. I wanted to fetch one. She looked as if she had been crying, and seemed in a sort of despair. She gave me half-a-crown; and indeed, sir, I would rather not have taken it. No letter came for her on the Thurs-

day or the Friday or the Saturday; I am sure of it, because she waited and watched for every post. No, sir, I don't know where her home is, and neither does missus. Missus was saying, only this morning, if she had known where she lived she would have sent that letter after her."

The editor did what he could. Not a rich man, he inserted one or two advertisements addressed to Miss B. D., who called on such a date, at such an office; but nothing came of it. B. D. made no sign. As she had flitted down the dark staircase, so she was now departed out of his reach. She might have been dead and buried for aught of sign that she made. It was the story of Evangeline re-enacted, with a difference.

Prosperity and success had been quite close to her, and, unknowing, she left behind the sunshine, and went out sorrowing into the night.

CHAPTER III.

IT was the golden summer-time. In the country meadows were dotted with wild-flowers; water-lilies bloomed in the cool shallows of slowly-gliding rivers; on the hillsides great patches of sunshine lay warm; the sea sparkled under a

clear blue sky, almost unflecked by clouds; a lovely season far away from London, but in town itself the heat was oppressive; the watered streets seemed to send up steam instead of coolness; and people resident in narrow courts and close chambers gasped, by reason of the oppressive atmosphere which seemed to grow even warmer after the sun went down, and to become almost unendurable in the watches of the night.

At his post in the old rooms, however, Mr. Kilham sat, regular and industrious as ever. Life with him had, for many a year, gone on in a pretty similar and humdrum fashion. Lucky it was that he did not dislike his profession or rebel at his calling. Year in, year out, found him walking the familiar streets at given hours, opening his letters as the neighbouring clock struck ten, discharging his duties with the regularity of an automaton and the careful honesty of an honourable gentleman.

When he took his annual holiday, it either assumed the form of a week's walking tour, or otherwise a Christmas visit to a distant relative who farmed about a thousand acres of land, and was, in the opinion of Mrs. Kilham, "an uncommonly common person."

This especial year, however, he decided to take no holiday. His outgoings had been larger and his incomings smaller than usual. Mrs. Kilham and family were at Scarborough, and some extra work, confided to him by a friendly publisher, would, he calculated, about enable him to send the required remittances to that fashionable seaport.

It was broiling weather, however, and he often found himself oppressed with a feeling of drowsiness and disinclination for mental exertion necessarily alarming to a man who trusts to his brain for the means of livelihood.

“This won’t do,” he said to himself one afternoon, after he had been vainly striving to concentrate his attention on the proof before him. “I must take a run out of town, if only for one night.”

At that moment a clerk entered with a bundle of letters which had arrived by the afternoon post, and Mr. Kilham, as his glance rested on them, groaned in spirit.

“Lay them down there, Jones,” he said, thinking for the moment that he would leave them unopened till the next morning.

Habit, however, proved stronger than mental

disinclination for the task, and, after a few minutes, he pushed aside his proof, drew the letters towards him, and glanced over their contents, which, as a rule, seemed to be of the usual description.

Old men and maidens, young men and elderly ladies, all anxious to rush into print, all certain the editor must receive their offerings with eager hands.

But at last there was one missive which he read twice, and then a third time, with eager attention. It contained the offer of a post which, if he had ever dared to hope, would have been the one good he might have desired.

It was a certainty. The duties were light, and of a nature consonant with his tastes. The emolument might by many have been considered low, but to Mr. Kilham it seemed absolute affluence.

This good gift came from a gentleman who had known Mr. Kilham's father, and was acquainted with the abilities of his son.

“If it is worth your acceptance,” he wrote, “I shall be more than delighted. There are several matters we ought to discuss *vivâ voce*, and, as I am not likely to be in town for some weeks, I venture to ask you to give us the pleasure of

seeing you here. My wife will be charmed to make your acquaintance; and the carriage shall meet any train by which you are good enough to say you will come to us. I trust you can make it convenient to remain for at least a week."

In a moment the world was changed for the man who had worked so faithfully and so long. Ease of mind in the future, the relaxation he so sorely needed in the present, provided as by the wand of a magician. After long years, it had come about as such good comes in stories; but in this case it was not too late, as in stories and in life good so often does come.

How rapidly he corrected that weary proof, with what different eyes he looked over the remainder of the letters! How much better and more graceful it seemed to answer, with a certain cunning flattery, the applications of would-be labourers in the literary market!

Life seemed a pleasure instead of a toil; and it was really a different-looking individual who, indulging in an unwonted extravagance, took a first-class ticket for Hardersbridge, that being the nearest station to Mr. Mayning's place in Deepshire.

Never fairer had summer afternoon seemed to

him; never had this world seemed so full of beauty, so desirable a place to remain, as on that Saturday afternoon while the train sped away, far away from London, and the pure sweet air that had passed over miles of new-mown hay, of springing corn, and dainty wild flowers, touched his forehead with a light caressing breath.

The carriage was waiting at the station gates and Mr. Mayning on the platform.

Behind lay the old dreary life. This was but the first taste of the beauty and luxury of an existence free from the depressing influence of sordid cares.

For that evening Mr. Kilham walked as one in a dream; everything was strange to him, and yet he recognised an extraordinary sense of familiarity with the objects which met him at every turn.

That broad terrace, commanding a view beyond the park of low blue hills, of a winding river, of distant cottages, red-tiled and picturesque; surely he had paced it or something just like it.

The very conservatory, the very odours of the rare plants it contained, revived in him some memory the source of which he could not at the moment trace. It was the same with his host and

hostess, the same with Miss Mayning and the young man who followed her about like her shadow.

In a dream the editor went to bed. As one in a dream he threw open his window the next morning, and looked out at the prospect through a tracery of dew-spangled roses and burnished magnolia leaves.

Neither was the church unfamiliar to him. Those marble flags draping the tomb of Admiral Mayning were as accustomed to his eyes as the steps in Fountain-court. The mode of conducting the service, the peculiarities of the Rector, the appearance of the clerk, the misbehaviour of the choir-boys, the position of the family pew—somehow and some time he must have been at Mayning before.

As they walked across the park, home, light dawned upon him.

“How wretchedly they manage that organ!” remarked Mrs. Mayning to her daughter. And the daughter, disentangling the fringe of a dainty parasol, replied,

“Yes, we miss Bessie now.”

“Have you heard how she is this morning?” asked the elder lady.

“Worse,” replied Miss Mayning. And then,

with a charming smile, she turned to Mr. Kilham and explained,

“We are talking of the dearest little creature possible,” she said, “who was so delightful as to manage the music at Mayning. We were the envy of all the parishes round and about. It was really quite a pleasure to listen to it.”

“And the young lady—she who played the organ, I mean?” asked Mr. Kilham, with a quick comprehension stirring his heart.

“O, Miss Dunlow! she is dying, poor child.” And Miss Mayning, still toying with that refractory fringe, would not show the tears which were brimming in her eyes.

“The best girl that ever lived,” supplemented Mrs. Mayning.

Mr. Kilham asked no further question, but, when luncheon was over, went out for a walk all by himself.

He had no difficulty in finding Mrs. Dunlow’s cottage—set back in a garden full of flowers, the windows almost covered with honeysuckle and jasmine.

In the porch Mr. Kilham met one of the boys, for whose welfare Bessie had toiled so long and so cheerfully.

“Can I see your sister?” asked the editor.
“Is she able to be downstairs?”

“O, yes, sir!” answered the lad; and, opening a door to the right, he announced the visitor, with no more ceremony than was involved in—

“Bessie, here’s a gentleman!”

She was lying on a sofa, near a pleasant window opening out upon a tiny lawn shaded by an old mulberry-tree.

Without any evidence of surprise she recognized her former friend, and held out a feeble hand in greeting.

“I thought you had quite forgotten me,” she said, with a wan pitiful smile.

“I did write, though,” he answered; and then he told her how he had tried to find her, and failed.

“Should you like the story to appear now?” he asked. “Would it be any pleasure to you?”

Pleasure, ah! The warm colour that flushed her cheek was answer sufficient.

He remained talking with her for a little time; but when he saw she was growing weary, he rose to take his leave.

As he did so, she laid her hand gently upon his arm.

“I want to tell you,” she said ; “it does not matter about that letter at all. If it had come, things might have been different, but they could not have been better. Mr. Mayning is going to see to the boys, and he has managed to get an annuity for my mother. Everything is well with me. It seemed hard at first, but it is hard no longer.”

“Will you do me the favour of glancing over that little story, Miss Mayning ?”

It was Mr. Kilham who spoke—Mr. Kilham, now quite an accustomed visitor at the Hall.

The season was Christmas. Out in the hedge-rows hollyberries glistened from amid the snow, which lay lightly on branch and bough and leaf. Inside the Hall there seemed a cold ice. Miss Mayning and her lover had quarrelled ; she had tried his patience that “once too often” Bessie Dunlow foresaw would be the case. He was going away, for good or for evil—for always ; and Miss Mayning was wandering restlessly from drawing-room to conservatory, from conservatory to library, trying to look as if she did not care.

Mr. Kilham’s seemed the strangest request, and yet it was grateful. The man who could

suggest the “glancing over a little story” must of necessity be unaware of the anguish of mind she was experiencing.

Miss Mayning took the magazine offered, and, sitting down, began to read—carelessly at first, with more earnest attention as she proceeded. When she had finished, she looked back to the commencement; that gave her no enlightenment.

“Do you happen to know who wrote this?” she asked, turning to Mr. Kilham.

“Yes,” was the answer. “Poor little Bessie Dunlow!”

“Bessie Dunlow!” she repeated in amazement. Then his eyes and her eyes met, and she understood.

“It is a touching story,” she said, after a pause.

“All stories which reflect life are, I fancy,” was his answer; and, leaving the room, he sought the rejected lover, who was superintending the packing of his belongings.

“Miss Mayning,” said the editor, looking out of the window, “has gone across the park to look at Miss Dunlow’s grave.”

“Indeed!”

“Don’t you think, before you leave, you would

like to look at it also? Believe me, she was one of your truest friends."

"Poor, good, dear little girl!"

"If she could speak to you now, I fancy she would ask you to pay her one last visit."

The valet had left the room when Mr. Kilham entered; and Miss Mayning's lover now fixed an anxious gaze upon his adviser.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"Just what I say," answered Mr. Kilham. "Bessie Dunlow always foresaw what has come to pass; but she would have given all she had to give to enable you both to understand your own hearts. If you follow Miss Mayning now, I think you need never doubt her again."

An hour later two affianced lovers came pacing slowly back across the park.

They had paused for a minute by the church-yard gate to look lingeringly at a modest grave covered over quite closely by the greenest and softest moss.

Hand in hand they stood, forgetting their new happiness for a moment in the contemplation of that mound, raised not many months before over the girl who had done so much, and done it so well.

“What a pity she died!” whispered Miss Mayning, tears gathering in her lovely eyes. Would Bessie have said the same?

Scarcely, I imagine. If the day were short, it had been full of work; if the battle had seemed insignificant, the victory was complete. Out of the hurry, secure from jealousy, quite safe and free from all trouble she lay, her task completed, her work done—

“With her limbs at rest in the green earth’s breast,
And her soul at home with God.”



HE LOVED AND HE RODE AWAY.

CHAPTER I.

A GARRISON and a seaport town, Castle Gifford might rashly have been supposed a gay and lively place.

Castle Gifford, however, was nothing of the kind. Detractors said it was the dullest hole on earth. Officers entered their quarters with misgivings, and left them with rejoicing; and yet, such is the perversity of human nature, that in the after days, when far away in India or baking under African suns, the memory of the old Castle recurred to them with a softened, almost tender feeling of affection. By that time they had forgotten the boredom, and the *ennui*, and the long hours during which they could find nothing to do or to interest them, and recollected only the fine expanse of sea and land that, turn which way they would their eyes rested on, the kindly faces that had brightened at their approach, and the hospitable greetings with which they, strangers in a strange land, were welcomed.

Nevertheless Castle Gifford was dull—deadly, hopelessly dull. Its best friend could not say the little town had the slightest claim to any brightness in the way of society ; and the principal reason why the place proved so horribly, aggravatingly stupid was that it kept itself in a state of chronic expectancy, and never could make up its extraordinary mind to settle down and try to evolve something satisfactory out of its internal resources.

If the reader has ever been so unfortunate as to live in the house with a child (old or young) who is always waiting for some one to amuse its youth or its age, or intimately known a person given to expect letters and do little or nothing between the hours of delivery save ask whether the postman has passed, he may form some idea of life at Castle Gifford.

The military proved the disturbing element in what would otherwise have been an exquisitely charming, sleepy, out-of-the-way corner of this beautiful world. Even the monotonous murmur of the sea failed to soothe into dreamy repose minds always marvelling what the officers coming in barracks would do—what the officers who had just gone were doing—what the officers who were to come after would be like.

If the inhabitants could only have thought a little more of themselves, and a little less of the Ensigns, Captains, and Majors who destroyed their peace, what a pleasant society anyone might have found in the little town spread all along the bay, with green hills swelling softly on the opposite shore and rising grounds, which attained almost to the dignity of mountains, stretching away behind the harbour and the castle, and the church and the pretty houses, till their dark grey summits seemed to touch the tender azure of the summer sky.

It was all down on the coast that the champagne country lay—a country rich with waving corn-fields and luxuriant meadow-grass—with broad acres of flax, the loveliest and most delicate-looking crop that grows—with pasture lands, where meek-eyed cows chewed the cud lazily—with woods, where beside wandering streams woodcocks and kingfishers were to be found, and plantations through which hares and rabbits scurried on their way to the wild commons that lay between the broad belt of cultivation and the bleak, desolate uplands that afforded such shelter to game of all sorts, and presented to sportsmen the double fascination of starting a covey and trying to break their own necks at the same time.

Castle Gifford took its name from an old ruin near the shore. Nobody supposed Gifford had anything to do with the building itself, which may or may not have been, as was stated, in existence before the Christian Era ; but at some remote period a Gifford owned the property on which it stood, for which very insufficient reason the remains of the structure came down to the knowledge of posterity in conjunction with the name of a man who probably knew as little about the edifice as those who in later days made picnic parties to the walls that still remained.

The mortar which held the huge stones together was mixed with shells, and the whole mass had so fused together, solid rock itself was not harder than the masonry, antiquarians were in the habit of declaring could not be destroyed.

For two thousand years past, as far as was known, no person had tried to destroy it ; but the feat could have been performed no doubt, had any efficient mind devoted itself to the enterprise. As for the other castle which formed so grand a feature in the landscape, where the officers' quarters were situated, it was comparatively a modern erection, having been built about the third century by some king with an unpro-

nounceable name, who apparently made as little of lifting blocks of stone as the individual who designed the pyramids. It must once have been a place of great strength, before the arts of modern warfare proved how easily apparently impregnable fortresses can be taken. It was once possessed of a moat and drawbridge and all the other accessories which in former days belonged by prescriptive right to a castle ; but the moat was now filled up, and a carriage road ran from the outer to the inner gate, and visitors were allowed to go over the fortifications freely—except one dungeon, where, it was rumoured, a ghost resided in company with the gunpowder which Government had stored safely down among the rocks on which the building was founded.

A scare had once been got up about this gunpowder, and representations were made to the authorities that some ladies, of old family and slender income, who resided opposite the castle gates, much feared that if an explosion took place *their windows would be broken*. Upon this, engineers were sent to view the place, and they reassured the minds of the inhabitants by reporting that, from the construction of the tower, they were able to say positively, supposing an almost

impossible accident occurred, that part of the castle would be blown *straight up into the air*. Wisely, they never even hinted where the fragments might be expected to come down.

As for the officers who, night after night, had slept peaceably beside that mine of danger, their name was indeed legion. The memory of the oldest spinster in the town—and there were several who might have competed for that honour—went not back to the time when caps were not being pulled, about which maidens seemed fairest to eyes that looked down from the castle walls on the youth and beauty of the little town.

There had been officers of all sorts of characters, all diversities of tastes, and all degrees in life.

Fops and martinets, saints and sinners, the impecunious heirs to old titles, and the sons of rich and gluttonous aldermen — Castle Gifford found a welcome for every one of them. It was as willing to weep with those who wept—providing they wore epaulettes—as to pipe for those who danced. With one exception, no officer could be unwelcome ; that exception, it is grievous to state, was the officer who brought his wife with him.

It had come to be understood that in Castle

Gifford ladies who took up their abode in the pretty quarters in the Castle—almost overhanging the sea — were not to be visited. There were good reasons for this, as the town had been shamefully imposed upon on two notable occasions. Yet the unwritten decision did fall hard on brides who could, if necessary, have produced their “marriage lines,” and matrons who were as sternly virtuous as the severest censor of morals in Gifford, as the place was affectionately abbreviated.

Heavens! the doings of the officers in that little town would, if put into print, fill one of the shelves in the British Museum. The bare-faced way in which they led girls to suppose they had serious intentions, and then went back to their lawful wives, whose very existence had never been suspected. The way they talked and walked ; the way they marched out at the head of their men through the most fashionable street of Gifford ; the way they lounged up and down the promenade ; the way they made their horses curvet in front of windows through which prettier faces than those belonging to old ladies watched awe-struck the antics of these centaurs ; the luncheons they ate ; the dinners they swallowed ;

the balls they attended; the private theatricals they got up; the mad leaps they took out hunting; the risks they ran; the love they made; the loves they forsook; the friendships they formed; the friendships they forgot; the caricatures they drew; the valentines they wrote; the habit they had of “going courting for pudding and pie;” the sermons some of them preached; the hours which most of them gambled; their extravagance; their recklessness; their carelessness; their pleasant ways; their utter want of any sense of gratitude; their apparent inability to become attached to anything on earth except themselves; are not all these matters writ large in the annals of Gifford, which went on from year to year, innocently believing the next officer it got its male kind to call on would not prove a gay deceiver, but choose a wife from amongst the many daughters it contained who were “open to an offer.”

It may well be imagined that round and about the town, but yet out of it, there were many desirable mansions, the owners of which set their faces strongly against this military craze. As a rule they were gentlemen who, not having the means to formally invite the officers to

stately dinner parties, decided to have nothing to do with them. Morning visits were exchanged between the ladies of these households and their town sisters, but there was no intimate, or indeed any friendly, intercourse. Tastes differ, as we know, and habits once formed are difficult to change.

The town delighted in the esplanade, where an officer was generally to be found; the suburbs—to distinguish the class referred to—which could not by any means claim to be “county people,” took its walks abroad in rural and lonely regions, where the bold gaze of Captain or Lieutenant never intruded to make its cheeks redder than a soldier’s tunic. Sometimes one of the proscribed race conceived a desire to become acquainted with the families who lived “quietly.” Had their wishes ever been gratified, they would have found the dreadful stagnation of that simple state of existence something too terrible to be expressed in words.

Rich enough to be above the necessity to work; so poor as to be unable to enjoy—life did not flow, but crept sluggishly on its way. Young people, as a rule, deemed it a dreadful thing to sleep away the “best years of their

life," but their elders were firm. They did not mean their daughters' minds to be unsettled by dancing with redcoats, and listening to unmeaning compliments. They did not believe in the expediency of having strange men, of whom nobody knew anything, save that they wore Her Majesty's uniform, lounging in their drawing-rooms, wandering through their gardens, eating their cherries and pears, shooting their birds, stopping for luncheon, and lingering for dinner. They had not the means, and they had not the inclination for this sort of life; they did not think it quite respectable; and, upon the whole, who shall say their idea was not right? Men here to-day and away to-morrow are not the best or safest acquaintances to introduce into families; though, to the credit of the military and Gifford be it said, that, although the officers did not marry any of the Gifford young ladies, no scandal ensued in consequence of their presence.

No home lacked a daughter whose name was not mentioned; no husband mourned a wife worse than dead. Gifford might be and was a little bold and unmaidenly, but no one could assert it lacked virtue; nevertheless, gentlemen who lived on their own lands felt the town society to be

fast and undesirable, for which reason their daughters passed the tenderest portion of existence in a state of almost nun-like seclusion, watering their flowers, copying music, learning new songs, walking, riding, driving, having friends stopping on visits, but going out into society simply not at all.

Amongst those who lived this life—who lived, indeed, a life more retired than any of his equals—was a Mr. Howard Laurence. He had entered into possession of his patrimony, Hillmont, with high hopes and a heavy mortgage. He had money inherited from his mother, in a small way an heiress; so, being able to marry as he liked, he chose the daughter of a very old county family, who made up in length of pedigree, grace of manner, and sweetness of disposition what she lacked in wealth. There never was but one child born to them, Nellie; and, as if fate had only waited her advent to swoop down upon Hillmont, the very day she came into the world news arrived of the failure of a great bank in which Mr. Laurence had shares. Those were the days of un'limited liability, and for fifteen long years the unfortunate gentleman went on paying calls and growing poorer and poorer. His health failed,

his spirit seemed broken, but, after a fashion, he was still a very happy man—he had his wife, and Nellie, and his property. By living in the most economical manner he was able to pay the interest on the mortgages; but it proved totally beyond his power to make any provision for wife or child. At his death Hillmont would pass away to a male relative. Mrs. Laurence had only fifty pounds a year of her own, so that there seemed no future for the girl unless she married well.

In this world there probably was never any girl who thought less about marrying at all or who looked more unlikely to attract a great and wealthy husband than Nellie Laurence. Pale in face, tall and thin in figure, unformed in manner, shy before strangers, at seventeen she had nothing noticeable about her except her eyes, which were, everyone said, far too large. Even her mother failed to think Nellie beautiful. Yet she did not despair—unlikely girls often make good matches—and there was an indescribable something about the girl everybody took to.

She was so simple, so unselfish, so loving, so tender-hearted, it might be some man of sense and discrimination would pass by a more gor-

geous flower to gather and love this delicate blossom.

She was only seventeen, and it was possible—though this Mrs. Laurence, who had herself been at that age a reigning beauty, somewhat doubted—that Nellie would become handsome after a little, when she had done growing and filled out, and learned to think more of herself.

Amongst the friends of Mrs. Laurence's earlier married life there had been a certain Mrs. Poolton, who, dying very suddenly, left three daughters to scramble up to womanhood as they could, in which process their father, a pleasant, agreeable spendthrift, gave them little or no assistance. Hillmont having been always open to them, Nellie had learned to regard them as sisters, and they in turn said they loved her more than any sisters could.

They were very charming, very clever, very well connected, very accomplished, and, like young chickens early deprived of the shelter of a mother's wing, soon learned how to take very good care of themselves. They spent most of their time with their great relations, and at length, when Mr. Poolton, unable to meet his creditors any longer, had to leave his native country and shift about

as well as he could in France, the girls, quite grown up, were forced to spend their time altogether in houses which were not their own.

At length one—the prettiest and youngest—made an admirable match. The husband was rich, good-looking, good-natured, generous, idle—but he lacked family. That was precisely what his wife could supply; and so well pleased did he seem with his share of the bargain that he let her lead him about like a sheep, choose her residence, her friends, ask her sisters to live with them, and, in fact, order the course of the whole of his existence.

Amongst the lady's charming fancies chanced to be one for spending a summer at Gifford. She and hers had gone through a good deal of trouble in the pretty little town, and she naturally desired to rejoice there, now rejoicing seemed possible. She wished to exhibit her carriages, her horses, her liveries, her wealth, her husband, in Gifford. She drove the sweetest little phaeton, drawn by the dearest pair of rats of ponies, along the Esplanade. She brought over the newest fashions from Paris, where she had met “poor papa,” who was still unprepared to meet his creditors, and last, but not least, she took Sea Hall for the season.

Sea Hall was the great house of the neighbourhood. There Mrs. Laurence's forefathers had lived—before they diced, and raced, and drank up every acre of the land and every stone in the building. The property then fell into the hands of a certain nobleman, who wanted “votes” for the county, and, as the Hall was too large and too expensive for anybody who did not own the estate to reside at, and as he did not want to live there himself, it was let, when it was let at all, at a large rental for the summer months to English people—for no gentleman in Ireland could have afforded to take it—and the agent was painfully strict on the subject of references.

Mr. Wells, however, who had, as the world jestingly said, married the three Miss Pooltons, was able to humour his wife's whim, more especially as it brought him in contact with all the county people, who were so grand and exclusive, and all the aristocrats of the town, who were so pleasant.

Rather a racketing sort of life was led by the family at Sea Hall; but quiet evenings were spent there occasionally; and when the occupants chanced to be “quite alone,” or had only “a friend or two,” be sure little Nellie Laurence, as

Mrs. Wells called her, was of the party. Her love for the girl was very genuine.

“She has never had a bright home for years,” said Mrs. Wells to her husband. “They are so wretchedly poor and proud. She won’t come when we have company because she has no dress, and I dare not offer her one. I do wish she could meet with somebody as rich and good as you —you dear old goose.”

“Ah, Lesley,” answered the “dear old goose,” “there is a vast difference between you and Miss Laurence. I am afraid the prince has yet to be born who would woo such a Cinderella,” for Mr. Wells had all a rich man’s love of appearance, and he could not admire a girl who was nothing to look at, had little to say for herself, and seemed perfectly incapable of making the most even of the few advantages she possessed.

Mrs. Wells, however, was not so easily dis-couraged.

“There is something about Nellie, if we could get men to see it,” she observed to her sisters. “I should be so glad if Major Trellick, for ex-ample, would take a fancy to her. He is a little too old, to be sure; but he has everything ex-cept youth that a girl can want, and I do not

suppose he is more than four or five-and-thirty when all is said."

"I think he likes her," answered Maud, the second Miss Poolton. "Have you noticed that he is able to make her talk?"

If at heart Mrs. Wells had not been a thorough match-maker, she never could have suited herself so admirably; and one of her understood, though unexpressed, objects in coming to Sea Hall was a hope that she might so manage affairs as to bring about an alliance between Maud and a certain scion of nobility for whom that young lady had in former days vainly sighed.

The Misses Poolton, since their sister's marriage, had begun to entertain high views for themselves. They could several times have married wealth; but they desired that and a good deal besides. Lesley having, Christian-like, thrown herself, for the benefit of her family, into the pit of mere riches, it behoved them to contract very much finer matches.

If only the Honourable Fitzmaurice Athlone, whom she had always more than liked, would propose for her, Maud Poolton felt hers might be a very happy life. He had a beautiful place, a good rent-roll, was well-born, and amiable. He

was now constantly at Sea Hall, and so was his friend of about four weeks' date, Major Trellick—a man admirable, so said Gifford, in every respect. He was the best shot, the best rider, the fastest walker, the swiftest rower, the most accomplished officer the old castle had ever seen within its walls. He had rescued a man from drowning. He had taken a leap across Gifford Falls that was thought worthy of being commemorated with a stone and an inscription. He played on the piano beautifully, and sang divinely. He was adored by the Gifford beggars, who, if dirty, were picturesque and grateful. His men liked him; he was popular amongst his equals; he had read, travelled, met people worth knowing, and seen adventures he had a faculty for recounting well. He was not dependent on his pay. Father or mother he possessed not, to please or distress. He was his own master. Could anything be better for Nellie Laurence? Nellie, whom he really seemed to single out and delight to talk to; Nellie, by whose side he walked the shore often and often in the summer evenings, which seemed so beautiful and balmy, and unreal to the girl in that happy, happy time.

Along the sands, it so happened, they were

generally *tête-à-tête*; for Maud and the Honourable Fitz were in the habit of leading the van. Mr. Wells, still a good deal in love, followed with his wife, while that "lazy pair of dreamers," Nellie and Major Trellick, moved along in the rear, talking of the sea and the shells, and the scenery and the ships, and of everything almost upon which they could talk, excepting love.

At a very early period of the acquaintance Miss Poolton, who never joined in those evening rambles, being far too good-natured to spoil sport, laughingly warned Nellie against the fascinations of the Major, who, she said she had heard, was a "shocking flirt." Nellie often wondered what she could have meant by this, for the Major certainly never flirted with her, nor paid a compliment; never showed her one of the many small attentions the girl, even in her limited acquaintance with the opposite sex, had been accustomed to receive.

He talked to her sensibly and quietly, he did her the great honour of treating the child-girl quite differently to any woman he had before come in contact with. He found her well-informed, well read, original, companionable; and as the days grew into weeks and the weeks into

months he could not but understand he felt more than a common interest in Nellie Laurence, which, if she had been differently circumstanced, and he of another temperament, might have led him seriously to consider whether he could bring himself to marry a girl who, except her eyes, had not a good feature in her face, who was what his fellow-officers were in the habit of calling lean and lanky, whose very best dress was made of white muslin, who had not a friend in the world likely to leave her any money, the state of whose father's health compelled him to dine at two o'clock in the day, while the extremely low condition of the family finances obliged Mrs. Laurence with her gentle smile to say, she "did not visit."

It was a thing which would not do at all he felt, and yet for many a year he had never been so much inclined to allow himself to fall in love. As matters were, however, he had been very careful both for Nellie and himself. If the little girl liked him, and he believed she did, no word or look of his could be blamed for such a catastrophe. He had not flirted with her. He had not tried to make her fond of him, and yet he knew she was,—could almost hear the fluttering

of her young heart as he drew nigh,—could see the little flush of pleasure in her cheek, and detect in her eyes the welcome she was too shy and modest to utter.

It was towards the end of that happy summer—the grain had been cut, and was standing in stooks on the sides of the uplands as well as down in the fields by the sea—the autumnal tints were already touching a leaf here and there in the plantations. Mignonette, heliotrope, and verbenas, chary of growth a short time previously, were now running about the garden of Sea Hall like wild, beautiful children; the myrtles had shed their flowers long before; the loveliest and finest part of the whole year in Ireland had come, and now Major Trellick's regiment was ordered off, not merely to other quarters, but out of the country. The small portion of it stationed in Gifford was to leave the next morning to re-join the main body in the nearest large town, from whence the gallant —th were to embark for India. Who could tell how many of those composing it would leave India. Only one thing seemed certain: it was most unlikely any one of the number would ever return to Gifford. And Gifford lamented, and could not be consoled,

while poor Nellie, on whom the news fell suddenly, felt stunned.

Never had the moonlight seemed to her so sad and beautiful as it did that night while she walked home along the shore. She tried to speak on indifferent subjects; but after a time her voice died away and she turned her head aside, and looked seaward with a terrible trouble tugging at her heart.

“And so this is the last time,” said the man whose lightest word thrilled Nellie’s soul.

She did not answer—she could not for the tears that welled up into her eyes and prevented her seeing clearly moonlight or water, or the distant hills.

“The last time—Nellie—” he said, uttering her name unconsciously.

Still she did not speak; she only turned her face further seaward, while her tears, salter than the briny waves, fell silently on the sand.

“Have you nothing to say to me?” he asked. “Are you not in the least degree sorry that I am going away, perhaps never to return?”

It was too much. She had tried bravely to hide her trouble, but now she could not help it; a sob betrayed her.

“*Nellie—darling, my own love*—do you care so much?”—and now the moonlight was blotted out completely, his arm was round about her, and her young head, with its wealth of soft brown hair, lay on his shoulder. She was sobbing, bitterly, passionately, and he was kissing her cheek and uttering every term of endearment that was ever spoken to the most tenderly loved woman man adored.

“How can I live without you, sweet?” he asked at length. That was a question he should have been best able to answer. As for Nellie, she could only gasp hysterically,

“Oh! do let us walk on; they will wonder where we are.”

They had been standing in the shadow of a huge boulder which concealed their figures, but now they turned this obstacle; the sweep of the shore lay clear before them, and far in the distance they saw the figures of their companions revealed in the silvery light of a moon well-nigh at the full.

Scarcely knowing what she did, the girl hurried on, almost stumbling over the loose shingle.

For a minute he quickened his pace, so as to

keep up with her; then, laying his hand on her arm, he said—

“Do not walk so fast, dear—I cannot part with you like this.”

She did not answer him: first or last she had not replied by a word. Whatever difficulty there might be he had brought on himself. He felt terribly agitated; he had gone further than he intended; he had not meant to let expressions which could never be recalled pass his lips. If she had been older and wiser it would not have mattered so much he thought, but this tender, trusting, innocent little girl he did not know what to do with.

“You are a very early riser, are you not, Nellie?” he asked at last. It seemed a perfectly irrelevant question, and Nellie answered it with some surprise.

“Generally,” she said, not very distinctly.

“Well, then,” he went on slowly, as if thinking out something as he formed his sentence, “do not you think you could manage to meet me on the beach to-morrow morning—say at the rock where we were standing just now?”

She looked at him for the first time—lifted her great eyes, and looked at him with an ex-

pression of sudden and amazed pain on her tear-stained face, which haunted him for many a day after.

“What can he take me for?” she thought; and there was reproach as well as sorrow in her eyes.

“I meant no harm, sweet,” he said quickly; “I only spoke on the impulse of the moment. Of course you could not do that: I must come to see you and—your father. At what hour do you think I might venture to call? It will have to be early,” he added, with a grave smile, “as we leave so soon.”

Too dazed to understand clearly what she was saying, Nellie answered—“Any time; but you don’t know papa.”

“I hope I soon shall know him,” was the reply. And then they had to move on, for they saw the advance guard making signals for them to come up.

“What *have* you been doing, good people?” asked Mrs. Wells, as they approached. Major Trellick said they had been admiring the effect of the moonlight upon the water, and went on to state he had never seen the bay look to such advantage. But Nellie crept round beside Mr.

Wells, and did not open her lips till, at the gate of Hillmont, she bade her friends “Good-night.”

Some fresh pecuniary trouble was oppressing Mr. Laurence and his wife; but they cheered up at sight of Nellie, whose eyes, washed with recent tears, were brighter and her cheeks redder than they had ever before seen either.

“Why, Nellie, you look quite radiant,” said her father.

“It is such a beautiful night,” she answered, totally unconscious of the nonsense she was talking, so guilty did she feel—almost satisfied her parents, if they looked at her closely, would see a stranger’s kisses on her face!

“I hope you have not been catching cold, love,” said her mother anxiously. “That scarf is thin; I wish you had taken a shawl.”

She did not tell them anything of her happiness that night. She felt as if she must have a few hours’ enjoyment of her secret ere imparting it to others.

What a new light seemed all at once to illumine her world—how different everything appeared to what it had done the previous night. After a time she crept up to her own room, where she sat down by the window, which com-

manded a view of the town, and the castle, and the sea, recalling the touch of his hand, the tones of his voice, the words he had spoken, the passionate language he had used.

But yet she was conscious of one discord in the exquisite melody that had ravished her ears —one note that still jarred upon her senses.

He had asked her to meet him beside the sea; and not even the fact that he was coming to Hillmont to see her father in the morning could reconcile Nellie to the memory of a request which seemed to her so terrible.

Spite of her late vigil, she was up by dawn, again looking over the sleeping town, and the sea greeting the beams of morning as it had done the moon's reflection over-night. When she heard her father go down-stairs, her first impulse was to go and tell him Major Trellick meant to call very, very early; but, somehow, she felt she could not do this. Her lover must explain everything himself. "Her lover!" Nellie looked in the glass and wondered, though a new light was shining in her eyes, and the red in her cheeks had not faded through the night.

At breakfast she could only swallow a cup of tea, and again Mrs. Laurence feared she had

caught a chill. All the morning she was restless, going from room to room, looking out of window after window.

But he did not come.

Noon approached—passed ; and still Nellie watched and waited in vain.

Dinner-time arrived ; and again, the girl failing to eat, her mother said she felt sure she had taken cold.

“ You really ought to be more careful, child,” she exclaimed.

Well, well ; we have all to buy our experience, bad or good !

Toward four o’clock a loud and long double knock resounded through the house ; and Nellie, who long previously had given up expecting the promised visitor, started from her chair.

It was only Mrs. Blake, the curate’s wife. She had always a great deal to say, and she said it.

One of her themes that afternoon chanced to be the departure of the —th, which, indeed, formed the talk of the town.”

“ Yes,” she proceeded, in answer to a remark of Mrs. Laurence, “ they marched out at half-past twelve ; and I never saw a sadder sight. I happened to be calling on old Miss Jamieson, and

so had a full view. There were all the poor girls the privates had been making love to running beside them, crying and screaming and wringing their hands. The men, of course, could not leave the ranks—dare not, indeed, even look at them—but marched steadily on. Well, it may be a fine thing, as some people think, to live in a garrison town, but, for my part, I hope the next place we go to we shall never catch sight of a redcoat."

That evening Nellie could not even drink her tea, and Mrs. Laurence felt more satisfied than ever she had caught a chill.

CHAPTER II.

MISS ELLEN LAURENCE, aged seventeen, had been privileged to have a greater experience of lovers than falls sometimes to the lot of ladies considerably older than herself. It is said, perhaps untruly, some arrive at threescore years and ten without ever having received an offer !

However that may be, one thing is certain—Nellie had been asked in marriage twice before that little episode beside the sad sea waves. One of her suitors was a man over forty ; while the other, at the period he contemplated marriage, had only seen twenty-one summers. Secretly,

Mrs. Laurence would not have felt sorry if Nellie could have liked her elderly lover.

There were times when she felt very much dispirited about her daughter's future. For herself, she saw no resource, should anything happen to her husband, save taking a house in the town and trying to eke out her income by letting lodgings; but she dreaded such a fate for her birdling. It was chiefly for this reason she encouraged the rector. He had a small living up amongst the hills—a pretty house—a private income; was a gentleman, and possessed of a nature she believed calculated to make her darling happy; but Nellie said "No" so decidedly, it seemed of little use urging the point further; while Mr. Laurence asked his wife in amazement what she was thinking of.

"Why, the man is nearly thirty years her senior," he remonstrated.

The same fault could certainly not have been found with Nellie's other suitor; but the astonishment and incredulity with which she received his proposal were even greater than that felt by Mr. Laurence when told that a gentleman but little younger than himself had asked for his daughter's hand.

It was in the old-fashioned garden at Hillmont that Nellie was astonished by her second offer.

“Marry you, Nat!” she said. “You are joking.”

“No, indeed—indeed, I am not,” he answered. “There is nothing in the world I would not do to get you for my wife. I never remember the time when I did not love you.”

“And I love you, but not well enough to marry you.”

“I think you might try, Nellie—won’t you?”

“It would not be of any use. When people love they have not to try.”

“How do you know anything about that?”

“Well, not from experience exactly, of course; but still I am sure love won’t come by trying.”

“But, Nellie, dear”—

“Now, Nat, I shall be very angry with you. I would not for any consideration be obliged to quarrel with you; and yet I must quarrel if you go on making yourself ridiculous. Besides, I never mean to marry anybody. I am going to stay at home all the days of my life, and comfort my mammy. I should like to know what you think they would do here when papa is sick, and both he and mamma are sorry, without their little girl—no, don’t, please, Nat”—as he opened his lips to speak again—“we

shall always, I hope, be the best of friends, but we cannot be anything more."

"I am not grand enough for you, I suppose."

"NAT!" Oh! what a world of rebuke she managed to put into that word. And then she held out her hand for him to take, and so gave him to understand even that crowning piece of iniquity was pardoned.

Mr. Nat had, however, some reason for the idea, since Castle Gifford would have thought it the height of presumption for him to aspire to Nellie Laurence. Even the townspeople looked down on his position in the social scale. He was young and straight, and not bad-looking; yet it would have greatly scandalised any one of the ladies who looked so kindly on officers, frequently of very doubtful lineage, if he had asked her to take him for better, for worse. His parentage was, indeed, of a singularly mixed order; his one grandfather being an English baronet, and his other a retired captain, who lived in a little cottage situated about a mile further from Gifford than Sea Hall. The captain having been in the merchant service, it is perhaps unnecessary to say Gifford—which drew a line of demarcation at anything below the Navy—refused to recognise his existence. But this sort

of estracism did not much trouble the old salt, who smoked his pipe as contentedly, and with his telescope raked the vessels in the bay as composedly, as though his table were groaning under notes of invitation, and all Gifford were hungering and thirsting to do him honour.

Within two years after the Captain's marriage his young wife died, and, after various attempts, more or less unsuccessful, to get the child she left behind "seen to properly," he abandoned his profession and settled down for good in the little cottage, on the lawn in front of which he planted a flagstaff and mounted a cannon.

He had some trouble in having his daughter educated to his mind; but at last he induced two ladies in a neighbouring town to Gifford, of whom he had heard a good report, to receive her into their select establishment.

"What I want is this," he explained, laying down the law with the first finger of his right hand slowly beating the palm of his left, "to send my girl where she'll learn the ways and habits of a lady. I'll have a bit of money to leave her, and I shouldn't like her manners to shame her fortune."

After some show of hesitation, the Misses O'Neill

consented to think the matter over, intimating, however, that before finally deciding to take Susan Beattie it would be necessary for them to see the embryo heiress.

The Captain offered to bring her over, “or, perhaps, ladies,” he said, struck by a brilliant idea, “as you sometimes pass close to Sea View Cottage on your way to and from Gifford you would not mind breaking your journey: I have some curiosities it might please you to look at, and I am sure I should esteem your visit the highest honour.”

Who knows? Perhaps Miss Typhenia O'Neill, who was still considered very attractive, had an idea something would come of this.

The invitation, at all events, was graciously accepted, and when the Misses O'Neill, after a pleasant visit, were safely packed into their phaeton by the Captain's hands, he clearly understood Susan was to be educated by ladies who modestly claimed that the blood of kings ran in their veins.

“Though it is unhappily clear,” said Miss Typhenia to her sister as they drove slowly homeward, “that the Captain has not been accustomed to courts, he seems to be a very good, honourable sort of man, and the child is charming. She will

repay all the money he is prepared to expend upon her."

Thus it happened that at sixteen Susan Beattie was returned to the paternal residence as true and perfect a little gentlewoman as her father could have desired to see.

"It might have been well," hinted Miss O'Neill, "if Captain Beattie had found some lady of mature age to superintend his household;" but as the Captain, though grateful, did not take this hint, Susan was installed as mistress of the establishment, and a very pretty and winsome mistress she made.

One memorable day the Captain, lounging along the beach, came across a young man who was sketching. The pair got into conversation. The stranger did not seem very strong or to know exactly what he wanted. He said he had not been well—that he had been "loafing" around the coast—that Gifford had attracted him—that he would like to take some views in the neighbourhood.

"I have nearly finished this little thing," he said, showing the Captain a bold, dashing drawing of the scene spread out before them. The Captain was delighted, and invited him up on to the lawn at Sea View, which commanded a still

wider prospect. Little by little the intimacy grew, till at length the young man, asking if Captain Beattie could tell him of any good, cheap lodgings to be had away from the row of that confounded bugle and the drum-beating, which seemed never ending in Gifford, the matter ended by an invitation given and accepted “to put up with” such accommodation as the guest chamber at Sea View Cottage afforded; and “if you don’t like to be in my debt,” finished the Captain, “you can give me a picture, and that will more than repay me.”

He guessed, and guessed rightly, that the stranger was in some sort of pecuniary embarrassment, and ere long he knew the whole story. The youngest son of Sir Hugh Howys-Howys, he had quarrelled with his father on the two usual vexed subjects that disturb the peace of families, the choice of a profession and the selection of a wife. Sir Henry wished to decide about both for his son. His son refused to go into the army or to marry his cousin Alicia.

“If you only saw her,” he said to Captain Beattie, in what that gentleman called his feeble English drawl. “Good gracious! if you only saw Alicia.”

Possibly because he had not done so the Captain advised submission; but on this point the young man was firm. "I could not possibly marry Alicia," he declared; "and as to my father, he does not like me. He never did. I was my poor mother's favourite, and he and she never could agree."

"He has no backbone," decided the Captain, "but I think there's no harm in the lad."

He felt inclined, however, to rescind this opinion when one morning he found both his daughter and guest missing. In a terrible state of mind, he had just taken down an old blunderbuss, and was about starting in pursuit when the pair walked coolly in, declaring they had "only been out to get married."

"I knew it was of no use asking the governor's consent," observed Mr. Howys-Howys, "and that you would never give yours unless he did; so I told Susan the best thing we could do was to settle the matter ourselves, without troubling anybody."

"I doubt you have done a bad morning's work," was all the Captain answered.

"That time alone can prove," replied the bridegroom; "and meanwhile I should like to have some breakfast."

Captain Beattie wanted Mr. Howys to write to his father, but he refused to do so.

“Then I shall,” declared the Captain.

“You will only bring a hornet’s nest about your ears.”

The Captain was not, however, to be deterred from discharging what he considered a duty, and accordingly wrote and dispatched the following letter:—

“To Sir Hugh Howys-Howys, Bart.,
“Howys Park,
“Nr. Worcester.

“Sir,—I greatly regret to have to inform you that your youngest son, Mr. Henry Howys-Howys, yesterday married my only daughter, Susan Beattie.—Your obedient servant,

“NATHANIEL BEATTIE.”

To this epistle there came in due time a reply, written on very thick paper, and sealed with an imposing crest.

“Sir Hugh Howys-Howys presents his compliments to Mr. Beattie, and begs to acknowledge Mr. Beattie’s letter of the 10th inst. Sir Hugh Howys-Howys incloses the address of his solicitor,

in case any further communication should become necessary."

Twice after that the Captain wrote to the address inclosed. Once when a son was born and once when Henry Howys was brought back to the cottage dead. He had been out in a small sailing vessel, which, being caught by a sudden squall, capsized in a moment. A cutter lying at anchor close by without an instant's delay manned a boat, and dispatched it to the scene of the disaster. The sailor and boy, who, with Mr. Howys, had been the only persons aboard, managed to keep afloat till succour came. He went down like a stone. He rose, and again sank; when he came up again he was dragged out of the water, but all efforts to resuscitate him failed. The squall was over and the sun shone out once more, but Susan Howys was a widow and her boy fatherless.

Some lads who were fishing at the time rowed hard ashore with news of what had happened; and Mr. Laurence, then a bachelor, was just stepping into his boat, and about to push off from land, when he saw a woman, crying like one distracted, flying along the sands towards a little landing-stage, for which a cutter's boat

was making rapidly. Without more to do he shipped his oars, made fast his skiff, and ran down to see what was the matter.

When he heard what had happened, he accompanied the men who bore the body to the cottage and stayed there with Susan till her father could be fetched from Gifford. It was thus he came to know Mrs. Howys, and when he married he got his wife to call on the sorrowful woman, who would never probably have found courage to take up life's burden again if her father had not chidden her grief, and said,

“Do not darken God's sunshine, Susan, for the boy.”

This was the boy, grown to manhood, who asked Nellie Laurence to marry him. She did not say anything about this offer to her mother. She was far too fond of Nathaniel Howys to risk his being forbidden the house; and she had a notion—nay, she knew—that while grand relations resided in England, honest Captain Beattie, who smoked a clay pipe and was tabooed by Gifford, lived at Sea View Cottage.

The Captain had done the best that lay in his power for his grandson. He engaged a person in the neighbourhood to come for a few hours each

day to ground the lad in such things as were necessary for him to learn ; and when Nathaniel outstripped his teacher, and grew old enough to leave home, sent him to a good school in Lancashire. From thence he proceeded to Trinity College, Dublin, which seat of learning he had just left when he proposed for Nellie.

How far her refusal influenced his decision it is difficult to say ; one thing alone is certain, all of a sudden he renounced his former intention of reading for a barrister, and declared he had quite made up his mind to go to London and become a civil engineer.

So he went to London, and his mother went with him ; and the very season the Pooltons took Sea Hall Captain Beattie found himself for the first time alone at the cottage.

When Christmas came round, as he was not well enough to go to London to see his daughter, she and Nathaniel returned to keep holiday with him, and it was then Mrs. Howys saw with dismay the change a few short months had wrought in Nellie. The girl looked like a ghost.

“ She caught a chill one evening in September,” Mrs. Laurence tearfully explained, “ and she has never got over it.”

As for Nathaniel, he watched his old love very curiously, but he said nothing; no, not when his mother lamented over the girl's changed appearance, and the Captain remarked, "if aught happened to her it would break Mr. Laurence's heart."

There was something about Nellie he could not understand—a tone in her voice, a look in her eyes, a subtle inexplicable change in her manner—even the very "Good-bye, Nat," was different—sweeter, sadder, softer.

Everybody seemed to think she was falling into a decline, but he knew better.

"She has been through the fire too," he thought. "I wonder who it is."

In the spring of the following year he, then working very hard indeed, surprised his mother one day by saying—

"Don't you think if you asked Nellie Laurence to come to you on a visit the change might do her good. At any rate, she could have the best advice in the world here."

Intimate as she had been at Hillmont for nearly twenty years, Mrs. Howys scarcely liked to send the invitation suggested. She feared it might be considered a liberty; but her son, who

had happily rid himself of many of the ideas which troubled the minds of the residents in Gifford, insisted so earnestly she should follow his suggestion, that at last the note was penned, and Nathaniel took it to the post-office himself.

Somewhat to the widow's surprise, Mrs. Lawrence gratefully accepted her invitation.

"I believe nothing but a thorough change of scene and air can benefit my poor child," she wrote. "Dr. Magrath says her lungs are not touched yet, but I am sure I do not know what to think. She eats nothing, and though she tries to keep up for our sakes, I can see she has lost all her health and spirits."

Poor mother—poor Nellie—if the child could but once have wept out her trouble on that tender breast she would soon have recovered health and spirits. After all, her pride was more touched than her heart. The shame of it seemed as though it must kill her—the shame of having been kissed by a man who could go away and forget her, and never, never send a sign of remembrance.

"Yes," she said, "she would be glad to visit London for a short time," but she did not add how thankful she should feel to get away from Gifford.

She had never walked on the sea-shore, she had never passed Sea Hall since that evening when the moonbeams danced on the waters.

After all, she was still a young, tender creature, and the thought of having been so treated was dreadful to her. At times, she fancied every one in Gifford must know her secret, whereas not one soul in Gifford would have believed the story had she proclaimed it from the church steeple.

It was wonderful how much better she got after her arrival in London. Everything was fresh, and new, and strange. She was taken out of herself completely ; sometimes she almost forgot that such a person as Major Trellick existed. With quite a sense of relief she remembered that he was in India—that thousands of miles stretched between them. By degrees, her appetite returned, and that deadly pallor changed into something of warmth and brightness. To her amazement, she found she could still laugh—she soon began to take her old interest in all Nathaniel's doings. After a time her letters home grew quite cheerful. Altogether, when the autumn arrived, and Captain Beattie, who had been to London likewise, on a visit to his daughter, escorted her home, it was a totally

changed Nellie who threw herself into her mother's arms, and hugged her father till he asked,

“Why, what miracle has the English air wrought on my little girl?”

All through that winter, though they were very poor at Hillmont, they were very happy. Nellie was well again, and what could money troubles signify? Nellie had endless stories to tell about London sights and London doings. Nellie felt sure Nathaniel Howys would get on well there. He was so clever and so good and kind.

That winter passed, and another spring came, bringing a most extraordinary change in the position of Captain Beattie's grandson.

Sir Hugh Howys-Howys' solicitor called upon the young man for the purpose of informing him that Sir Hugh desired to make his acquaintance.

Nathaniel did not reciprocate this desire in the least, but his mother persuaded him to go to Worcester, where he discovered what his grandfather wanted was to persuade him to give up all idea of civil engineering.

“It is quite an unfit profession for a man who

may some day succeed to a baronetage," said Sir Hugh, pompously; and that was the first intimation Nathaniel received of there being only one poor life between himself and rank and riches.

But he would not count upon such a chance. He said plainly that if he ever was a baronet it would be time enough for him to cease earning his living, but that till then he would rather not become a dependant.

Sir Hugh took this decision better than might have been expected; and Nathaniel returned to London and settled down into his former groove as speedily as might be.

He made his mother promise she would say nothing on the subject to anyone; and so he went on working steadily till August, when he took a holiday and returned to Ireland.

It was then he asked Nellie two questions.

"Will you tell me," he said, "why you always refuse to walk in the direction of Sea Hall, and what was the matter with you that winter before you came to London?"

She had been accustomed to tell Nathaniel everything from the time she was a child, and so she never knew exactly afterwards how it

chanced that for answer he got the outline of a story from her she never meant to have indicated to any human being.

“It was an officer, of course,” remarked Mr. Howys; and then he added a remark under his breath which it was wrong for him to utter about so deserving and distinguished a class of men! Nellie hung her head and answered nothing. She would not say who it had been, but now her trouble was shared by somebody else a burden seemed lifted from her heart.

“And after a little, when I am making a good income, you will marry me, Nellie?” he went on after a pause. “You won’t say ‘no’ again when you understand how miserable you would make me?”

“But Nat”—

“I won’t listen to any ‘buts.’ I am going straight back with you to your father and mother, for I have something I wish to tell them.”

CHAPTER III.

FOR nine happy years Ellen Laurence had been a loved and honoured wife, when one night in a

London ball-room she saw a face she recognised. It was changed—the years cannot come and go without leaving marks of their progress—and yet she knew it instantly. So utterly had life altered for her since she saw that face last, it seemed almost like an appearance from some former world. If her own childhood had arisen in bodily shape—if the slight, unformed, great-eyed girl of seventeen, in whom no beauty could be found, the girl called Nellie, had returned from the vanished past, and, in her pure white muslin dress, glided amongst the dancers—Lady Howys would have felt less astonished.

She was Lady Howys now—ill-dressed, unformed, undeveloped no longer; but a very queen amongst women; her hair wreathed into a coronet round her shapely head; her face beautiful in the very prime of its loveliness; her black velvet dress trimmed with costly lace contrasting against the whiteness of her neck; her manners those of the world in which she had long moved; her movements easy, sweeping, graceful; not a trace of the callow girl was left, save her eyes, not too large now for a face rounded and softened so that no single feature looked out of keeping

with the rest. Her mother, had she not seen the slow progress of that wonderful change wrought by health and happiness and maturity, would not have known her daughter, and certainly looking in the glass, which reflected her figure from head to foot, the daughter seemed sometimes unable to recognise herself.

And yet here was one who seemed suddenly to have stepped out of the past almost unaltered.

For a moment a mist arose before the woman, who looked on the scene before her; and as in a crystal she saw that never-to-be-forgotten evening arise from its tomb, and, casting aside the cerements of twelve long years, stand in actual presence before her.

The lights of the ball-room faded away; the music died into silence; the dancers disappeared; the flowers, the diamonds, the fair faces, vanished; a thousand sweet odours no longer floated round; but in the place of all these things she beheld—a lonely shore, a sea glittering under the moonbeams; a great rock, casting dark shadows on the sand; a slight girl, dressed in white, with a black scarf thrown around her shoulders, and, walking by her side, while the mournful murmur of the waves lapping over the

shingle sounded in her ear, the man whose face in this far different scene had arisen so suddenly before her.

Often, in the days gone by, she had pictured their meeting in some such fashion—she in the zenith of her beauty; she whom he had despised, and deserted, and humiliated—surrounded by friends, rich, happy, married; she had thought how she would look, speak, act. She had hungered for the chance of repaying him in scorn, of saying some cutting word, meeting him with the iciest politeness; and now the time had come, the time as she might have chosen it for herself, and her only feeling was a desire to escape, so that she might not hear the voice, which had once such power to stir the depths of her girlish heart, or be forced to look again at a face she thought in those far-off days the handsomest, woman's gaze ever rested on.

She was close by the conservatory, and in an instant she had slipped round the silken curtains that shaded it, and wandered on till she found a seat hemmed in by ferns and camellias and palms, and all rare exotics.

How long she sat in this hiding-place she did

not know, when she was aroused from a reverie of the past by a young voice exclaiming,

“Oh! Lady Howys, how you startled me—who would have thought of finding you here?”

“I stole away for quietness,” answered Lady Howys quite steadily, though within a yard of her stood the man she had never met since that night when he said he would call early the next morning to see her father.

“Will you allow me to introduce Colonel Trellick?” said the young lady, who chanced to be one of the daughters of the house, and the ceremony was duly performed.

As she coldly inclined her head, Lady Howys’ cheek paled a little, and for a moment she lacked courage to lift her eyes; but she need not have feared. Between the girl, sobbing by that lone, sad shore, and the magnificent woman before him there yawned a chasm Colonel Trellick’s imagination failed to fill. If he had never seen Nellie Laurence, he could not have been less conscious that he was looking at her then.

A gentleman came shortly to claim the young lady who had promised him the next dance; and then Colonel Trellick asked Lady Howys if he “might have the pleasure;” but she said she

was tired, and so he remained amongst the fuchsias and the camellias, and once more after the years they were alone.

Flowers always furnish a topic of conversation—flowers did then. He spoke of those in India, and by degrees their talk shifted to Europe and the orange-flowers and myrtles of the sunny south.

Ah! could he only have known it, Lady Howys had heard him talk of those orange-flowers and myrtles before.

“I have just come from Italy,” he said.

“And we have just returned from spending a month in Ireland.”

“I was quartered in Ireland once,” he observed thoughtfully.

“We were staying in a very quiet part of it,” said Lady Howys, fanning herself slowly as she spoke. “Near a little town called Castle Gifford.”

“How very odd,” he exclaimed, “that is one of the places I knew well.”

“My husband’s mother lives about three miles from it,” went on Lady Howys calmly, “at Sea View Cottage.”

“I do not know it,” he said. “I know Sea Hall.”

“Sea Hall is nearer Castle Gifford.”

“Oh!” and there ensued a moment’s silence.

In total absence of mind he had plucked a camellia bud, and he was pulling it to pieces.

Lady Howys watched him curiously.

“He has not forgotten,” she thought.

No, he had not forgotten.

“Do you know many families in that neighbourhood, Lady Howys?” he asked after a pause.

“I know a few. Is there anyone you wish to inquire about?”

“There was a young girl I used to meet at Sea Hall—almost a child—I have often wondered what became of her.”

“If you tell me her name perhaps I can inform you.”

“She was a Miss Laurence; her father lived at Hillmont.”

“Yes, I know the family you mean. Mr. Laurence’s circumstances were at one time rather embarrassed, but the railway—there are railways now even at Castle Gifford—was made through his property, and he is at last quite rich.”

“Then he is alive”—

“And in very good health. I saw him the day before we left.”

“And his daughter—is—she”—

“She is married—and very happy”—

“I am rejoiced to hear it, truly rejoiced,” but he did not look so.

“She married a civil engineer,” went on Lady Howys.

“Well, I am astonished,” he said, throwing down the last shred of the camellia bud.

“May I ask why?”

“I did not think she would marry. She seemed to me a dreamy, sensitive sort of creature.”

“I believe she was.”

“She interested me immensely, and I am sure I never knew exactly why. She was not pretty.”

“So I have heard.”

“She was painfully shy, thin, unformed, plain and sallow, had very little to say, and certainly gave no promise of beauty. She was little advanced in her teens and young even for her age; and yet, do you know, Lady Howys, she was the only person in Gifford who left an impression on my mind.”

“She ought to feel highly honoured, I am sure.”

“Pray do not laugh, I am quite serious. If

you had told me she had come to an untimely end, or taken to writing poetry, or even had developed into a celebrated singer, I should not have felt astonished ; but to hear she married a civil engineer is too great a shock."

"But a civil engineer may be a very worthy person, surely."

"No doubt, yet scarcely a hero of romance."

"Will you take me down to supper, Colonel Trellick ?" said Lady Howys rising. He gave her his arm, and they passed out of the conservatory and down the broad staircase and into the crowded supper-room together. He procured his companion some refreshment, and they talked about London and Paris and Vienna, and many other places with which they were both acquainted ; about the opera, and the latest play ; about the last new novel and the most celebrated preacher. Then they went upstairs again, and as they went Lady Howys, pausing on the first landing and seeing that they were quite alone, said—

"I have a secret to tell you, Colonel Trellick."

He looked amazed, looked as if he thought his companion had taken leave suddenly of her senses, but he said nothing, only bowed.

“I am Nellie Laurence.”

“You! Lady Howys—Good Heavens!”

“Yes, my husband was a civil engineer when I married him; he succeeded to the title about three years since, I——I had known him all my life.”

He could not speak; if she had struck him he would have felt less astonished.

“I am very glad to have met you to-night,” she went on calmly—as calmly as though she had forgotten that sad sea-shore, the glittering waters, the rippling waves,—the memory of her own young sorrow. “And I forgive you all the disparaging remarks you made just now about my personal appearance. Oh! here is my husband, let me introduce him to you——”

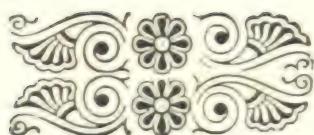
But when she turned again to Colonel Trellick he was gone; he who had never feared to face an enemy fled ignominiously then.

“Who was that gentleman, Nellie,” asked Sir Nathaniel curiously.

“Never mind; an old friend,” she answered smiling. “A friend I have long wished to meet.”

“There is a look of the old Castle Gifford days about you at this minute,” remarked her husband with watchful tenderness.

She said nothing but drew a little closer to his side, a whole world of love, and trust, and thankfulness shining in her eyes.



PRETTY PEGGY.

“YES, I knew her. I did so, sir ; and it is truth I am telling you—though her father was only a miller, no less, no more, and she just a miller’s daughter, there was not her like in these parts, and I believe there was not her like in the country.”

It was Peter Carrigan who made this broad statement—old Peter, half fool, half poacher, whole rogue—and he was seated on the bank of a river which supplied the flour mill lying below with water, talking to an English gentleman who had, as the fact was locally phrased, “come over for the fishing.”

“Had the miller no other child?”

“Not a one, sir. She was the first and the last, and though he was a plain sort of a man himself, hard-working and careful of his money, he thought the best in the world was not good enough for her. If he could have hung her with diamonds, he’d have done it ; if he could have

loaded her with gold she'd have been weighed down. He worshipped the very ground her foot touched, and a sight of her laughing face seemed to warm him like the sun. There never was a father so fond before, nor a daughter so fit for a father to be proud of." And having rounded off this sentence to his satisfaction, Peter rekindled his pipe and puffed for a few minutes, meditating.

"You see that cottage down there," he went on, after a pause, "with the red and white roses growing up to the eaves, and long windows opening on to the lawn, and steps down to the water, and a weeping willow shading them—aye, your honour, ye may well say it's a sweet spot, for it was made so for one that was as sweet and heart-some as any flower in May. I mind when that cottage was not much better or bigger nor a labourer's cabin—in course it was in a way better and bigger, for the miller lived there himself, and had added a room and a kitchen, and other odds and ends—but still it wasn't a bit like what it is now. There used to be a potato garden where all the beautiful shrubs are growing wild, and in front there was trodden ground to the river's brink. It was Mrs. Rafton had it sown

with grass seed, but, God help her, before it came to any length the grass was growing over her——”

“Leaving this only child?”

“Yes, sir, Margaret—Pretty Peggy—that was what she called herself as soon as she could lisp, and faith the name stuck to her; but she was more than pretty—she was good and merry, and had sense beyond the common, and though she was made enough of to turn a wiser head, she kept hers steady, and never grew proud—never through all.

“The last day I saw her living she put a hand in mine—so thin and white I was afraid of crushing it—and said, ‘Daddy Peter’—she always called me Daddy Peter from the beginning, when I used to carry her on my shoulder over the stepping-stones, and find the wild bees’ nests for her, and gather rushes to make swords and parasols and butterfly-cages and the like—‘Daddy Peter, those were good times we had together, you and I, long ago when I was young.’

“‘When you were young?’ I made answer, ‘And what are you now, Miss Peggy?’

“She raised herself as well as she could on her elbow, and looked at me with great, serious eyes.

“‘I am an old, old woman,’ she answered, ‘going down into my grave. You used to make believe you were burying me in the hay for fun, Peter. Well, now I am going to be buried in earnest.’

“I knew it was true. No call for doctor or parson to tell me. I could see for myself there was death in her face; but I cried, ‘Don’t say that, Miss Peggy, and you not one-and-twenty years of age till Lammas.’

“‘I do say it,’ and she shook her head in the wilful way she had from a child. ‘I have been too greedy. Many a woman can make her life last out for sixty and seventy years and more, but I ate it all up as fast as I could. And now it is all done; there is only a crumb or two left. That was why I wanted to see you, Peter, to say good-bye.’

“She spoke as calm and unconcerned as I am doing now, but I could not find a word then.”

“She did die, though, I suppose?” hazarded the Englishman.

“She did, sure enough; but when I began to tell you about the trick she played old Mullan, and the laugh she raised against that

skinflint McCrae, I hadn't it in my mind to let you know it was a dead girl I was talking about. Where my story ought to have ended, I began. The cart before the horse, isn't it, sir? But then my heart was full and foolish. It always is when I come this road and see the cottage where she isn't, and the river she'll never row down nor up again. And she was the rower. But there—whatever she turned her hand to she did beyond the common."

"But what did she die of so young?" asked the other, looking listlessly at the rippling water, in which it was no use trying to fish at noon-tide. "Consumption? That seems to be the curse of this country."

"It's one of them, anyhow," answered Peter, drily, "and the doctors said it was that took her; but I knew better. It was not that her lungs were so bad, but that her heart was broke. She wouldn't let on what ailed her, and she made believe she had never been so happy or so merry or so content in her life; but many's the time I've seen her when she thought she was all alone, walking along that path there and sobbing, sobbing, sobbing every step she took. It was the broken heart wore her out—"

“How did she break her heart? Did she fall in love?”

“Well, you see, there was one fell in love with her, and she liked him too—better, maybe, than he deserved, though I have nothing to say against him—but she would not hear of marrying. She had her notions, and I won’t say she wasn’t right. I’ll tell you the rights of that, sir, if you’d care to hear them.”

“Yes, I am interested in poor pretty Peggy.”

“May I never, if you have not got hold of her own very words. ‘I was pretty Peggy once,’ she said, handing back the looking-glass she had asked for, to see if she was much changed—‘but I think I am poor Peggy now. Poor Peggy and poor father.’ All her thought was for her father, for he had made an idol of her. And, indeed, no one could have been off thinking much of her, for she had ways of her own would have wiled the bird off the bush; and when she was but a child, even Lady Todmarsh allowed that——”

“Who was Lady Todmarsh?”

(Afterwards Peter said, “I never came near the like of that man for asking questions. It was just ‘Why?’ or ‘What?’ or ‘Who?’ or ‘Tell me,’

from screech of day to set of sun. But there was one good thing about him—he would hear you out, and not keep slipping in a word in the thick of a story, like most of the English it has been my luck to come across, who can't bear to hear anybody speak but themselves.")

“She is not dead—she is Lady Todmarsh—who else would she be?” he said, in reply to his companion's query. “Some as think they know the rights of everything better nor anybody, will have it she is not my lady at all; but if a lord's daughter isn't that, I'd like to be told what she is. She married General Todmarsh, who was killed in the Crimean War, and she never set foot in Ireland till Baron Blevere died and left her Black Abbey. He was her own uncle, and the title and the English estates went to some distant relation, but he was able to will Black Abbey to her, and he did, and a good day it was for all in these parts when she came among us.

“The agent—Mr. Flynn—it's his son has the agency now—he's the gentleman gave you leave to fish in the lakes—was keen that we should give her a welcome, and the priest, and the Protestant clergyman, and Sir Robert Girvan,

and Mr. Fordwich—and indeed the whole of the people round about, gentle and simple—took up the notion and did the thing right well. It was the height of summer and fine, and you may depend the town looked its best. We had arches and flags and wreaths, and every house, down to the very cabins, hung with garlands, and ‘God bless you,’ and *Cead Mille Failthe*, and crowns and harps and shamrocks and roses as plenty as buttercups in a meadow, and the miller’s daughter—then a bit of a child scarce eight year old—gave her a nosegay.

“It was Sir Robert said she was to do it—and whatever he said had to be done. He sent the flowers over from his own hothouses, and he taught little Rafton, as he called her, the oration she was to deliver, and Lady Girvan chose the dress she was to wear, and her father brought her up to the Blevere Arms himself, where there was a stand erected for the quality, and the ladies took charge of her till such time as she had to put herself forward with the flowers.

“Her ladyship’s carriage met the Abbey party at the nearest station, which was five miles off, but she was pretty punctual, and you never heard such an uproar as when we saw her

coming along the road at a slinging trot, the four bays keeping step like one horse, and the gentleman riding beside her, and men and boys running behind, holding foot with the horses. It was a great sight, your honour. I never saw its like before or since."

"And how did the child perform her part?"

"I'm coming to that, sir. What with the shouting and the music — for Sir Robert got over the military band — and the sight of so many strange faces—and so many faces that weren't strange, but that she hadn't been used to see altogether—Missy's speech went clean out of her head, and if it hadn't been for Mrs. Fordwich, who pushed her through to the step of the landau, her ladyship would never have got the beautiful nosegay at all.

"As it was, she leaned over the side of the carriage, looking so proud and pleased, as well she might—we could have given the Queen herself no grander welcome—and said, 'And are those lovely flowers for me, little one?'

"Then the child lifted her eyes to the handsome old lady — she had been a great beauty in her time—and answered, 'Yes, ma'am'—not a

word more—not a word of all Sir Robert had taught her.

“‘ And what is your name?’

“The poor thing was so flustered and frightened, she never thought to say, ‘ Margaret Rafton, your ladyship,’ and just whispered what she was used to answer, ‘ Pretty Peggy.’

“The bystanders could not hear, but her ladyship did.

“‘ Pretty Peggy,’ she repeated out loud; ‘ indeed you are,’ and she turned to the gentleman sitting beside her, with a smile, and all the cheering that had gone before was nothing to the cheering that went on then.

“Sir Robert, who had been to London often, and seen the Queen and the Duke of Cambridge, said afterwards he never witnessed any thing more noble than the way that lady took the child into the carriage and, when the people were quieted a bit, stood up, and, holding the little hand, thanked us all from her heart for the reception we had given her.

“She told us how she had lost husband, brother, son, fighting for their Queen and country, and that she came among us a widow and lonely, never expecting to find such warm friends

in a strange place. ‘I want to do my duty,’ she said; ‘I want to make life good and happy for you and myself, and I see this day if I fail to make it so the fault will lie with me—’

“We did not let her finish. We had the horses out the minute we heard her voice break—as it did break—and we harnessed ourselves into the carriage and drew her all the way to Black Abbey, the crowd following and cheering like mad.

“Just as we were starting, though, Missy saw her father standing, and stretched out her arms, for she was strange and timid. He pushed his way forward, and before her ladyship missed her Pretty Peggy was hanging round his neck, her face hid on his shoulder.

“That was the beginning of it. Nothing would do for Lady Todmarsh from that time out but for the child to be always up at the Abbey.

“She offered to take her altogether; but the father said, ‘She is my one ewe lamb,’ and that ended it.

“There was a Miss Cripp lived with her ladyship as a sort of companion—a woman of five-and-thirty or maybe forty years of age, and Pretty Peggy pleased and amused the pair of them.

“They taught her music, and singing, and French, and the deuce knows what, and when young Lionel Todmarsh, her ladyship’s grandson, came over for his holidays, she was best part of the time at Black Abbey to keep the young heir company. They carried on like mad things: rowing about the lakes, and riding round the paddocks, and playing at all manner of diversions. He was a pale-faced, delicate-looking slip of a lad, and it was new life to him to have such a comrade; and Lady Todmarsh was well pleased, but there were some who shook their heads and thought she maybe was not so wise as she might be.

“Well, this went on till Miss Peggy was between fourteen and fifteen, and Mr. Lionel a few months younger; and then when the next holiday-time came my lady said she would spend it in England with her grandson. Most like she had heard a word spoken: anyhow, young Lionel never came back any more for vacation, and we all noticed Miss Peggy was not up at the Abbey so much as she had been.

“But there was no break between the big house and the cottage; indeed, there seemed more friendliness, for Miss Cripp had come to

be Missy's governess, and whenever she was in Ireland, most days her ladyship's carriage was to be seen at the bend of the road there. The trees were not so thick then, and there was nothing much to shade the mill and the way to it."

"Pretty Peggy had fallen in love with the heir, I suppose."

"No, sir; nothing of the sort. Till she was close on nineteen she thought of nothing and cared for nothing, the creature, excepting her father, and amusing herself.

"She was up to all sorts of diversion, but still she grew to be her father's right hand man; she kept his books as well as any clerk, and rode over to the bank for him when he was laid up with rheumatism; nursed him if he was ill, and amused him if he was sad in heart. Miss Cripp had a fine time of it then; a good salary and the best of living, and not a thing to do but order dinner and spend her time knitting and talking and writing letters. She never knew what Miss Peggy was doing, not that the creature ever did any harm. There was not a bit of harm in her.

"It was the height of summer. The hay had

been got in dry, the roses were all in bloom, meadowsweet was blowing in the ditches, when one day, as she happened to be walking along just where we are now, sir, Miss Peggy met a young gentleman, who, holding out his hand, said, quite matter of fact—

“‘ You do not seem to remember me, Miss Rafton; but I knew you quite well.’

“‘ Oh ! Mr. Todmarsh.’ She knew him by his voice, d’ye see. I was near them at the time, and I saw she blushed crimson, and I wondered, for she had never coloured that way before that I could mind. It all comes back to me now, sir—just as maybe you can remember reading the opening page in a new book, not knowing then what it was going to be about.

“They fell in love then. It was like seeing each other for the first time, and yet they went on falling all the quicker, if you can understand, because they had been so much together and so familiar when they were boy and girl. They were young enough still, but it was man and woman’s love for all that. And they had not much pleasure out of it, either of them, Lord knows.”

“Mrs. Todmarsh put her foot down ?”

“She might have done, and she had known; but they kept it dark—not from any wrongfulness, but just because it is the nature of first love to creep away out of sight. The girl could do nothing till he spoke, and he was shy about speaking, for, maybe, he did not quite know his own mind all at once; and even if he did, most like he had no fancy to bring a house about his ears.

“For many a month he was not much at the Abbey, but at last he came to the cottage, when the spring was putting on her greenest dress, and even the wild flowers by the roadside were trying hard to look their best and bravest now the sun was out and shining.

“It was the heartsomest time of all the year in the country, and the height of the season in London, where my lady went regularly, for she was proud as kind, and she liked to keep up the old state; and she was terribly ambitious for her grandson, and meant to hold all the friends she ever had together for his sake.

“Then he came and laid his heart bare to Miss Peggy. He didn’t care, not he, for his grandmother or one belonging to him; all he

wanted was the girl he had loved, so he said, from the first time he saw her.

“And Miss Peggy made answer, she was not going to marry him then—or ever.

“But he wouldn’t believe her, and he kept on waylaying her, so that at last she couldn’t set foot across the doorstep for fear of meeting him. At last he walked past the servant into the house, and made his way to a little room Miss Peggy called her own, and they had a terrible scene, for when he left his face was set and hard, and she looked scared to death—and she wasn’t one easy to scare.”

“No doubt the old lady heard all about it after that?”

“She did so, but not the way you think—because why? Mr. Rafton was away from home; but Miss Peggy knew where to find money enough, and she just left a line to say, ‘I have to go to London, I’ll be back in a day or two,’ and, without anything more than she could carry, started to see Lady Todmarsh.

“You may think there was a fine hullabaloo. Her ladyship telegraphed for Mr. Lionel, and, after a great quarrel, made him go abroad, which he did sore against his will, vowing he’d come and

make Peggy marry him the day he was twenty-one. Such a set-to Mr. Lomax, the butler, told me was never heard before in a respectable house ; but, after a while, things quieted down, and the girl came home making believe to be happy and hearty, and hugging her father, and saying he'd have to put up with her for life, because she never meant to marry anybody, and least of all Mr. Lionel Todmarsh.

“‘ You’ll still think me your pretty Peg, even when my face is wrinkled and my hair grey, won’t you ? ’ she said, fondling of him and kissing him as was her way.

“‘ I’ll be gone long before a lock changes,’ he answered. Dear-a-dear, only to think. It does seem to me queer sometimes when I meet him now, an aged man, and remember how often the rose-bush at the head of her grave has flowered and lost its leaves since then.”

“She fretted herself to death, was that it ? ”

“Something of the sort ; but she kept up bravely to the last. In the spring of the year after, when she had been ill a good while, when she began to be dying, the damp winds of the river did her cough no good, and, oh ! but she was fond of the river to the last, and used to come up

here as long as she could walk so far, and when she couldn't had her easy chair close up to the window, where she could see the stream flowing on and on, ever and always.

“‘It is more like life than the sea,’ she said once; ‘there is no turning back.’ But, as I was telling you, when she began to be dying, who should come over sudden but her ladyship. She had never been near Black Abbey from the onset of the business till then.

“It was a soft mild afternoon that I saw her along the road beyond there, in the pony carriage, driving herself, and nobody with her but a groom.

“‘What’s up?’ thinks I. ‘Surely it’s never the cottage she’s for, and yet there’s nowhere else she can be going but the river.’

“So just out of curiosity I stood on my step and watched, and she pulled up at the little gate and handed the reins to the groom and was on the gravel path before he could jump down and help her. She looked every inch a great lady as she walked up to the hall door, her velvet gown sweeping the ground, and she never thinking nor caring about what came of it.

“The servant girl opened the door.

“‘How is she?’ says my lady.

“‘She’s a trifle better,’ says the girl, who didn’t know her, and could only stare to see one like a queen stepping across the square hall to the room where Miss Peggy lay, as if the house belonged to her.

“The girl would have asked her name, but Lady Todmarsh told her that she would announce herself, and with that she turned the handle and opened the door and went in.

“‘Peggy, dear,’ she said, ‘what is all this?’

“‘Oh, my lady,’ cried Peggy, ‘I am so glad, so glad !’

“And with that they kissed one another, cried as women do, and sat with hands clasped tight, and my lady crooning over Pretty Peggy as if the girl had been her own child.

“Miss Cripp was there, but they never heeded her. She said afterwards it was just as if they had been in a world with a wall round it, and nobody but them two selves there.

“‘I have come to bid you marry my boy,’ began her ladyship. ‘I was ambitious for him, but it is better for him to be good and happy than great.’

“‘If I had married him,’ said Peggy, ‘I should have had my ambition for him too. I would

have held him back from nothing great or grand, but it was not fit we should marry. I told you so from the first.'

"'We will make it fit now,' answered my lady.

"'Look in my face,' Peggy bade her, as if she had been the mistress of Black Abbey and Lady Todmarsh the miller's daughter.

"'It is pale and worn, my child, but we will soon nurse you back to health.'

"'Look in my face,' repeated the sick girl, 'and tell me what you see there.'

"'I see the traces of grievous illness and sad suffering.'

"'Nothing else?'

"'What else do you mean I should see?'

"'Death,' said Peggy, and her fingers, cold as ice, clasped the lady's wrist; 'and it is best so for us all—for me, for your grandson, and for you. I know the match was not for such as I. Do you think I could have gone and lived as you live, and left my father that I had known and loved all my life? I could just as soon have sat down in the warm by the fire, and shut the door and closed the curtains, and contented myself, knowing he was standing out in the wind and the

rain, cold and shivering. No, my lady, I thought it all out before I ever went to you, and I knew it was not fitting. I am tired now and can't tell all the thoughts that filled my heart. Indeed, even if I wasn't so tired, I could never put them into words, for when I was well and strong, I could only feel them. I used to picture myself living at Black Abbey, and fretting like a mother parted from her baby. Oh! my father, my poor, poor, doting father! What would any of your friends have thought, my lady, if I had asked them to meet him? and how could I go where he could not go, and how could I leave him behind? —'

“Peggy, Peggy, Peggy.” It was Miss Cripp cried out, and she put her handkerchief to the girl's lips and drew it away steeped in blood.

“There is not much more to tell about that, and maybe I've been foolish to trouble your honour with so long a story concerning one you never saw, but no funeral in these parts had so big a following.

“We would not hear of such a thing as a hearse; there were plenty of strong arms and willing hearts to carry pretty Peggy to her grave, and we did it. Mr. Lionel was chief mourner. I often wonder now whether, when he comes to

church with the grand wife he married and the children she has borne him, he ever thinks of the girl lying under the sod, who loved him so well. The gentry from all parts came in their carriages, and there was such a throng in the churchyard you might have walked on the people's heads.

“ And my lady put on crape and mourned sore for her ; indeed, though the present wife is related to the highest in the land, and had money enough to buy all Colonel Brian's property that marches alongside Black Abbey, there are those as do say she liked Pretty Peggy's little finger better than Lady Amelia's whole body. For the girl had ways with her man nor woman couldn't resist. She had the coaxingest voice and the merriest laugh and the wickedest eyes, when she was about seventeen, in the wide world.

“ It was only yesterday se'nnight that I met Sir Robert down by the ponds below here.

“ ‘ I never walk this way,’ says he, ‘ but I think of poor Miss Rafton. How well I remember the way she used to come round the bend in her light summer dress and saucy hat.’

“ So I says, ‘ It's beyond the common good of your honour,’ but I never let on that I minded that light print dress and sailor's hat far better

than he ever did, for I've noticed the quality like to think their own feelings and thoughts, and everything they own, better than anybody else's.

“‘I never could imagine where the miller got such a daughter,’ he goes on.

“‘It’s very hard to tell, Sir Robert;’ that is the way he likes to be talked to, sir. He’s a curious sort of gentleman.”

(“I wonder what way he thinks I like to be talked to,” considered the tourist.)

“‘She was a mischievous monkey once, Peter.’

“‘She was that, your honour.’

“‘Many a good laugh I’ve had over the trick she served old Mullan.’

“‘I don’t think, asking your pardon, sir, that was as good as the way she turned the laugh against Mr. McCrae.’”

“Was it not the story about Mr. McCrae you were beginning to tell me when you branched off to Lady Todmarsh, as you call her, and Black Abbey?” interrupted the Englishman.

“You are quite right, sir. As I said before, I put the cart before the horse. I was going to tell you both stories, but my tongue ran off with me; but I’ll do it now. I wish you had

known old Mullan; he was the priest's coadjutor, and a saintlier man than his reverence altogether.

“He never went out to the dinners of the quality, maybe, for one reason, because he wasn’t asked. He didn’t ask the mothers about their infants, or joke the girls about their sweethearts, or do anything but talk religion, read the best of holy books, and take a quiet tumbler on the sly. He was a big soft slab of a man, and I don’t think he’d a bit of harm in his body. But he was awful lazy. Whether it was the drop of drink or the fat on him, nobody knew; but he had the greatest notion of getting on the lee side of some bank and falling fast asleep. He had the finest choice in banks; he liked the grass soft and short, shamrock and thyme well mixed together, and if in the ditch near at hand there was a good sprinkling of woodroff it pleased him all the better.

“Miss Peggy knew his trick, and one day when she saw him settled down for an hour or two under an old thorn-tree at the top of a field where the hay had been just put into cocks, his spectacles on his nose, and his breviary on his breast, and himself sleeping as innocent as a new-born babe, what does she do but run home

as hard as she could, whip up a book that had belonged to a reprobate of an uncle of hers, and go straight back to where poor old Mullan was dreaming, maybe of heaven, or maybe of his dinner, for he liked his meals comfortable.

“In the twinkling of an eye she had the spectacles off his nose, and the breviary off his breast, and when he woke, which he did not do for some time, and then only by reason of the priest passing that way and speaking to him, he found a wicked story called ‘Tom Jones’ close by his hand, and the holy volume he had been meditating on and fallen asleep over clean gone.

“There was a whirra-roo, the priest didn’t know what to make of it, the coadjutor didn’t know what to make of it, nor a soul in the country side.

“Everybody thought it so sore a scandal that the priest was obligated to say it must have been a device of the Evil One, who knew what a saint Mr. Mullan was, and had a grudge against him in consequence, for since time out of mind there has always been a feud between the saints and the Devil; but the old man was very uneasy and troubled in his mind about the matter. He did not like the talk, and he missed

his spectacles, and he gave up sleeping in the open, which was a loss to him, and he took to napping in his study when he said he was reading about the blessed martyrs and their sufferings.

“It was a snug little room, with a glass door opening on to a grass plot, and there he would sit with his tumbler beside him, and the good books he could not read right for want of his glasses, open on the table.

“Well, one evening between the lights, he was not exactly sleeping, nor yet to say waking, but meditating, when, through the door, which was on the jar, there came an angel. You may laugh, your honour, but he said it was an angel, no less, a female angel, which is the best sort of all, and she put one hand across his chest and another over his eyes, and vanished, and when he came to—which, what with the surprise and what with the thimbleful of whisky punch that had got into his head, wasn’t for some minutes—there was his breviary open at the very page he had been reading when Satan took it away from him, and his spectacles on his nose, and the book that lay beside him gone.

“And the queerest thing about the whole busi-

ness was, sir, that the only volume the poor coadjutor could say he missed out of his shelves happened to be ‘Tom Jones.’

“He and the priest laid their heads together, and found out for certain that the second miracle must be the work of the blessed Virgin herself: that she had undone all the work of the Evil One, brought back the breviary and the spectacles, and, beyond all, taken away that awful bad book which was laid under his nose for a snare, and the fame of the matter grew and grew, and old Mullan was in a fair way of being made a saint himself, when young Brian of Kilcross let out he had seen Miss Peggy slipping across the good man’s grass-plot and into his study on the very evening the miracle occurred.”

“Miss Peggy was a venturesome young lady, then?”

“You may say that, faith. There wasn’t her like for daring in the country. She took as naturally to poaching as she did to the piano—not for the value of the fish or the birds, but just for diversion. It was about the set-to she and Mr. McCrae had I was going to tell you. Most of the gentry round only laughed at her doings, but McCrae, that rented Mr. Fordwich’s

place after Mrs. Fordwich's health broke, was one of another sort, and when he found Miss Rafton taking his hares and his fish and his birds, without either with your leave or by your leave, he was not to hold nor to bind. The game is not so plentiful now as it was then. At that time nobody thought a great deal about it—anybody almost could have a day's fishing or shooting.

"In the winter season in particular snipe and teal and widgeon and wild duck could be almost picked up, but Mr. McCrae had no notion of anybody picking up anything of his—he took the place for profit, and sent all he could kill to London.

"He was an awful mean chap, that always went about chewing a starved, sandy moustache, and kept a glass screwed in one eye, and put the servants on board wages, and, it was reported, weighed the potatoes out for the parlour dinner.

"He hated Miss Peggy like poison, and faith, there was no love lost between them. It was as good as a game of hide-and-seek to see the pair watching one another. She would put the old fowling-piece in the boat and row down to the ponds, and dodge round and round just outside McCrae's ground till she had him fairly wild.

“He was after her morning, noon, and night, but he never caught her till one day when she thought he had gone to Dublin. It was cruel weather, and a lot of wild duck had settled on the inner pond nearest the house.

“One she knew well, told Miss Peggy about this——”

“You, I suppose?” suggested the Englishman.

“If it pleases you to think so, sir, I am agreeable,” returned Peter, coolly. “Anyhow, whoever it might be, just when they were feeding she managed to get a shot among them. Carlo had just brought the first bird, and she was stooping to pick it up when McCrae laid a hand on her shoulder and said,

“‘I’ve got you at last, young lady.’

“‘Have you?’ she answered; and with that she pitched the bird right into the middle of the pond.

“‘Oh! that won’t serve you,’ he says; ‘we’ll see what Sir Robert thinks of such doings.’

“‘We will,’ and she laughed in his face.

“‘And if he won’t make an example of you I’ll carry the case to the Dublin courts.’

“‘Why not to the House of Lords at once?’ asks Miss Peggy, as bold as brass; and so she

went on till she made him that mad he would have taken her in custody then if he had known what to do with her.

“The magistrates didn’t want to have any say to the case, but nothing would content McCrae but that she should be brought up before them.”

“By Jove!” murmured the tourist.

“Yes, your honour; up to the very court itself. I was there and I saw her, and right pretty she looked, wrapped all in furs, with a jaunty velvet hat on her head, and an ostrich feather as white as snow wound round the brim.

“‘This is a very serious offence with which you are charged,’ began Sir Robert; ‘Mr. McCrae says that after repeated warnings he caught you in the very act of shooting one of his wild duck.’

“‘I not only saw her shoot the duck, Sir Robert,’ put in the other, all of a hurry; ‘but send her dog for it, and take it from him.’

“‘You did not.’ Miss Peggy said that.

“‘I request to be sworn, Sir Robert, instantly. I wish to state on oath that I saw this girl in the very act of picking up my wild duck.’

“‘You did not,’ says she again.

“‘I suppose you will next deny you were trespassing on my property?’

“‘I don’t know about your property. I was beside Mr. Fordwich’s pond.’

“‘And you shot a duck?’

“‘I did not.’

“‘And you threw that duck into the water.’

“‘I did not.’

“‘Sir Robert, I am willing to swear to the truth of all I have stated.’

“‘I should advise you not to do that, Mr. McCrae.’ And she gave him a little warning nod, so saucy and so confident, the magistrates were quite nonplussed.

“As for Mr. McCrae, he was white with rage.

“‘You impudent girl,’ he said. ‘Do you mean to tell me I am blind—that I did not see you shoot the duck?’

“‘I do.’

“‘And perhaps you say you didn’t shoot a duck at all?’

“‘I do.’

“‘But I suppose you shot something, Miss Peggy?’ put in the Chairman.

“‘I did, Sir Robert,’ she answered, quite collected.

“‘Then, in Heaven’s name, if it was not a wild duck, what was it?’ asked Mr. McCrae.

“‘It was a drake,’ she said.

“You never heard such a shout of laughter as came after that. Sir Robert laughed till he cried, and the other gentlemen were as much tickled as he was.

“‘I think, Mr. McCrae,’ said Sir Robert when he could speak—— But Mr. McCrae had left the room. If there was one thing he hated more than another, it was being made fun of. But see, sir, the fish are beginning to rise, and——”

“You certainly are the queerest people on earth!” thought the Englishman, as he took up his rod.



A SLIGHT MISAPPREHENSION.

CHAPTER I.

Secretary, Amanuensis, Librarian, Manager, Confidential Clerk, Position of Trust.—A young gentleman desires a post in any of the above capacities. He is highly educated, well connected, a good linguist, and possessed of agreeable manners. Unexceptionable references. Salary of secondary importance.—Address, R. B., Philomena House, Bow Road, E.

THAT was the advertisement to which one morning, only a month ago, I instinctively turned, and for very sufficient reasons. I was—indeed, I am—“R. B.” I live now, as I did then, at Philomena House, the residence of Mrs. Philomena Bruce, relict of the late Timotheus Bruce, who served Her Most Gracious Majesty in a civil capacity, and is buried at Ilford, a cemetery which lies on the further side of Wanstead Flats. All the young ladies of my acquaintance—and I am acquainted with a great many—say I have most agreeable manners. My mother is never weary of stating that the Bruces can claim an

even higher and longer descent than the Waffs, which is saying a great deal (she was a Waff); my teachers unanimously declared I knew all they could impart—and this, after mature reflection, I believe to be quite true; while, as for languages, I never met a fellow who could rattle off a whole lot of things in the time so fast and so well as I. Salary is not of very much importance to me. I require enough to pay my tailor and a few other trifles, but my father died in fairly good circumstances, and at my mother's death I shall succeed to the ancestral mansion called Philomena House and all the other estates, messuages, and so forth—more vulgarly styled Three per Cents.—and leasehold cottage and shop property belonging to my branch of the royal line of Bruce.

Meanwhile, my sole living parent is on the whole liberal, and if I could only be persuaded to marry a young heiress with high cheek-bones, sandy hair, and white eyelashes, by name Christina (generally shortened for purposes of affectionate address to Teeny) McTolridge, would at once relinquish in my favour some of the worldly goods she enjoys as widow of the late Timotheus—a person I do not remember in the least.

Liberal as she is, however, a man, even if he be only two-and-twenty, does not as a rule relish having to ask his mamma for a halfpenny every time he wants to buy sweets. When expressing a longing for a suit of summer tweed, or a wish for something very neat and new in cravats, it is chilling to be reminded one has many suits not half worn out, and that in one's left-hand top drawer in the mahogany chest there are a score of ties scarcely rumpled.

Further, my mother is always lamenting I have no taste for anything, and expressing regret she did not article me to a lawyer or bind me to somebody else, or even apprentice me to an honest trade, or do anything, in fact, rather than what she has done.

She was very ambitious for me once. She is still, and that is why she wants to article, bind, and apprentice me, all in one, to Miss McTolridge. Sometimes I feel very sorry for my mother. It is, as she says, hard to have only one son, and be disappointed in him, but am I responsible? She has bemoaned her evil destiny because I cannot be a bishop, a Prime Minister, a discoverer, a general, an admiral, a great preacher, a noted novel-writer, Lord Chancellor,

or even an alderman. Why, she might as well sit down and lament that I am not a giant. A man cannot, "by taking thought, add a cubit to his stature," neither is it possible for him to perform great mental feats unless he have the mind to perform them with.

Over and over again have I pointed this out to my mother, with precisely the same result. The end of our conversation is invariably a delicate hint on my part that women cannot reason, and a retort on hers that I am too idle and too fond of pleasure to do any good in the world.

It may be that I am idle. I neither admit nor deny the soft impeachment. It may be that I am too fond of pleasure, but I can solemnly declare I get very little except what I make for myself. No words—at least none of mine—can describe the deadly dulness of the daily life in Philomena House, or the ghastly liveliness of one of our "festive evenings," as our curate, Mr. Henry Gentle (called by the parish wits Gentle Henry), describes those social gatherings which my mother believes to be brilliant as one of Lady Holland's parties in the days that may never come again.

Some foolish persons have ignorantly wondered why Mrs. Bruce never married again, or, at all events, took a house in that vague region described as out West. As to the first, my mother could not marry again without losing her income, and as regards the second, if my readers will pardon the expression, Philomena Bruce knows a trick worth two of that.

Indeed she does ; she is somebody where she is—and she would be nobody anywhere else. In all those parts of London that elbow and jostle fashionable localities, there are hundreds, thousands, tens of thousands, of women as like my mother as peas in a pod ; so placed, so provided for, so minded, all anxious to pass for other than they are, to be thought richer, better born, better bred, better looking, than their neighbours.

Down East my mother has things almost her own way. She is very handsome still, has a stately carriage and dignified manners, a soft voice and pretty accent, and a way of referring to the past as if she had been a duchess. She is much respected by high and low. The rector has a great opinion of her, and so has the butcher. She lives amongst a number of admiring people, in a sort of semi-state, which is very touching and

tiresome. We are so genteel we dare not enjoy ourselves in the least.

On our festive evenings we repeat little paragraphs out of the society papers, and make believe that we are telling each other news. Miss McTolridge sings “Auld Robin Gray,” and other ditties of a similar length and equally lugubrious, and when they are finished our visitors shake their heads and say “there is nothing like the old songs after all.” Then a few card-tables are made up, and sixpences change hands freely.

Those who love gambling, gamble in a mild way, and those who love gossip, gossip.

At eleven white and red wine, together with cake, are handed round; shortly after, all guests depart, vowing they have spent a most delightful evening.

To make amends for her omission in placing me out in life, my mother has, ever since I was seventeen, been exciting all her influence to get me a suitable appointment. Members of Parliament have been interviewed, introductions to men of influence obtained, lords humbly approached, with a uniform want of success which might have daunted anyone save a widow blessed with an only son.

Earnestly she desired an appointment for me in the Civil Service, but to this the needful competitive examination proved a barrier; then she thought it would be nice for me to be a banker, but here again she was doomed to disappointment. By dint of great exertions she finally did obtain for me a berth in a shipbroker's office, which I left, not of my own accord, after a month's trial; a situation with a wine merchant, which did not suit me either; a stool in a colonial produce warehouse, which stool was sold by the official liquidator, together with the other effects, before I had time to look about me; then I went to a new insurance company, where I had to insure my own life and my mother's life, and might have been compelled to spend all my salary in paying premiums on the lives of all my friends, but for the happy accident of being taken so ill it seemed probable my heirs and assigns would ere long be in a position to claim the amount of my policy.

When I got better my mother said she did not know what to do with me, and I really felt unable to assist her imagination.

So far nothing certainly had suited me.

The happiest chances always turn up, however,

quite by accident; and it was thus I obtained a situation exactly to my mind.

That it was not to my mother's, goes without saying; yet, dreadful though the employment might be, in her heart I believe she was glad to see me doing anything.

Further, my engagement arose entirely through her devotion to Miss McTolridge; therefore she generally is wise enough to hold her peace about the vexed question.

One and all the McTolridges are ardent lovers of their native land. They love even the faults of Scotia, among which I class haggis, some word Mr. McTolridge pronounces "dhrumley"—(meaning to me unknown)—all Scotch songs, Scotch poetry, and oaten meal.

If there ever was a subject of which I grew thoroughly weary it was oatmeal.

The McTolridges chanted its praises in season and out of season. Each member of their household eats a big basinful of it every morning as a whet before breakfast; just as some persons like a few oysters before commencing the more serious business of dinner, so the McTolridges devour the horrible mixture called porridge.

“Laddie, ye should eat porridge,” the rich head of the household remarked to me.

“My boys were all brought up on porridge,” added Mrs. McTolridge.

“It is a wonderful stimulant to the brain,” said Miss McT.

“We used to get ours from Glasgow,” chimed in Mrs. McTolridge; “but we have found out a place where it is as good and as cheap as in Scotland—Gooday’s, in Dod Street. He has his own mills, and grinds himself, and it is just a bouquet to smell his meal. You ought to get a stone or two. All the doctors are finding out porridge is the finest thing in the world either to work on or play on.”

So the edict went forth. We were to have porridge to break our fast wherewith, and oatcake to eat with our cheese. My mother took up the cause with such zest that porridge spread like an epidemic about the neighbourhood. The quantity our servants got through was simply amazing. It is painful to add we found out subsequently that they threw it out among the ashes, and the dustmen kindly carted all away together.

It was my privilege to order and arrange for the delivery of the precious food. The way to

Dod Street lies across Bow Common, and Dod Street itself opens into the Burdett Road, altogether as new and as ugly a neighbourhood as anyone could desire to keep out of. Gooday had a huge warehouse backing on to Limehouse Cut, a sort of canal, full of black, slimy water, which in the summer smells horribly.

I went there pretty often to buy goods for my mother, the McTolridges, the rector, our many friends, and the Distressed Mothers' Aid Society.

We began with meal and developed into flour. Mr. Gooday's flour was so good, said the McTolridges. Cakes manufactured from it were much better than cakes made from any flour sold by the local baker, which was hard upon the local baker, who must have had his flour from Gooday or some other miller.

Some time elapsed before I had the happiness of seeing Gooday in the flesh. Usually I found him represented by an exceedingly Scotch Scotchman called Snodgrass, from "a mile on this side Kilmarnock," who cherished a profound respect for his compatriot, Mr. McTolridge; but one happy day, when this worthy individual was absent, the proprietor in person received my order, made out

the account, and asked where the goods were to be sent.

“Philomena House, Bow Road,” I answered.

“Philomena House?” he repeated, with some interest in his tone. “I know the place; where old Bruce used to live, isn’t it?”

I said “Yes,” adding, as a sort of rebuke, “I am Mr. Bruce’s son.”

“Are you now?” returned Mr. Gooday, not at all abashed—indeed, he was a man it would have puzzled anyone to abash. “You aren’t a bit like him.”

“Perhaps not,” I said loftily, “but I am considered very like the family.” And indeed I was so considered by my mother, who based her opinion on a remarkable portrait in our possession. It was contained in one of the many volumes of Robertson’s “History of Scotland,” and the resemblance, though not flattering, was indeed remarkable.

Looking in the glass, I could not deny I had the same surprised, not to say foolish, expression of countenance, the same look of being amazed about nothing, the same arched eyebrows, the same sort of hair, which seemed to stand bolt upright with fright, the same ridiculous mouth,

the same general effect of being somewhat underdone.

“Ah! I never was acquainted with any of the family,” said Mr. Gooday, to whom all this was of course unknown, “except your father and grandfather.”

“Did you know my grandfather?” I asked, surprised. I felt I was fast climbing up my genealogical tree, and should be level with the fellow in Robertson directly. Of course Mr. Gooday could only have known my grandfather at a distance; but still it is pleasant to hear about one’s ancestors.

“When I was a young chap, yes,” answered the miller. “He used often to come over to our farm. He liked to sit and talk about Timotheus; what a grand berth the Squire had got him in London. You’d have thought to hear the way the old man boasted, your father was one of the lords in waiting, at least, instead of only a Customs officer. However, he made a good thing out of his place. And so you’re his son, hey?”

I retired from the interview somewhat subdued, but I cannot say much astonished. I had always instinctively felt my connection with royalty was more remote than my mother insisted, and

when our claims to distinction were brought on the carpet was frequently assailed with doubts as to whether wine that needed such an amount of bush could be old and sound as we wished our friends to believe.

I did not mention this interview at home, but a terrible fascination seized me to see more of Mr. Gooday, and hear all he could tell me about my people. On one pretext or other I was constantly going to Essex Wharf, Dod Street, where I held long interviews with Mr. Gooday, who ended in taking a liking to me.

“ You don’t seem to have much to do,” he observed one day. “ Have you no trade or profession, or are you a gentleman at large ? ”

Then I told him how I was situated, told him about the C.S. examination, the banker who would not have me, the shipbroker who discharged me, the wine merchant who did not think me sharp enough, the colonial broker’s where the bankruptcy messenger came like a destroying angel, the insurance office for which I had to tout amongst my acquaintances, and, finally, mentioned the happy illness that delivered me from such an uncongenial occupation.

“Then you are doing nothing?” said Mr. Gooday, by way of comment.

“Not at present.”

“And nothing you want to do, I suppose?”

On the contrary, I assured him the desire of my heart was to do a great deal, particularly in the way of earning money.

“Only,” I went on, “I can’t endure sitting at a desk all day. I wish I could get something to do out of doors—I should not care what it was.”

“Shouldn’t you now?” asked Mr. Gooday.

“No, I should not,” I answered determinedly; “I’d rather be a dock labourer than penned up in one of those city offices.”

“I don’t think you would,” remarked Mr. Gooday, with a grin. “Those hands of yours don’t look as if they would relish hard work. However, if you are in earnest about wanting something to do out of doors, I think I could find you a light employment that would keep you on your feet a good part of your time.”

“No! Could you now? I shall be delighted. What is it?”

“Selling goods for me.”

“Selling—flour?” And I am afraid my face fell—as a vision of being white from head to foot

rose before me. One must draw a line somewhere, and I felt I must draw it there.

Mr. Gooday laughed. "I don't mean *here*," he said, "or in the way you think. If you like to try and get orders I will give you a small salary and a commission on all you sell. What do you say?"

I said I was quite willing, but I did not know anyone else I could ask to buy more meal or flour. "My mother has made everyone she can influence deal here," I added.

"I know that, and never wanted a penny for the trouble"—conceive my mother's indignation had such an idea been suggested—"not like McTolridge, who takes his regular discount. But to come back to yourself. I don't want you to worry your friends—all private people buy is neither here nor there in a business like mine, but go among the bakers and the corn chandlers and work up a local trade, and I will deal liberally with you. See, you take samples and prices, and you go into this shop and that, and though nothing may come of it at a dozen places, the thirteenth man may give you an order. You have a glib tongue and not an unpleasant manner, and you ought to make your way; at any rate you could try. If you fail there is no harm done,

and if you succeed, why, it's an income. Do you take the notion?"

"I will begin at once," I answered eagerly. "I have nothing to do this afternoon. I should like to try," which I did to such purpose that by the next day I had earned the, to me, enormous sum of one pound six and sevenpence.

"I thought you'd do," observed Mr. Gooday, as he handed me this sum; "you're not half such a fool as you look."

Mr. Gooday could be—nay, generally was—brutally frank; but I had latterly been so hectored at home on my inefficiency that I took his remark as rather complimentary than otherwise.

I did not tell my mother about my new occupation for some little time; when I did the news proved a sad shock, but she was a little consoled when she found the arrangement met with Mr. McTolridge's cordial approval.

"We'll see him Gooday's partner one day; always thought he would light on his feet."

I had indeed so lighted; no occupation could have suited me better. I could manage the bakers and the bakers' wives as if, to use my mother's disgusted expression, "I had been born one of them."

The thing I love most is talking ; and I talked to them by the mile. I was all things to all men, and inclusively to all women.

I was a Tory, a Liberal, a Radical in the course of one forenoon. Good Churchmen loved me ; so did good Dissenters. Elderly ladies approved of my conversation because it was so sensible, young ladies because it was so frivolous, mothers because I liked babies, spinsters because I adored cats. To me the life was delightful. I could work or not, as I liked. I could always have a day, or an afternoon, or an evening off at my pleasure. I had an instinct which told me when a man was shaky or dishonest, and saved Mr. Gooday from making some bad debts. I grew prosperous and proud, had thoughts of setting maternal authority at defiance, and striking out for myself a different line of life from that which obtained at Philomena House.

Pride goes before a fall. It went before mine.

CHAPTER II.

PERHAPS it has been already gathered that Mr. Gooday was somewhat blunt in his manner. Unhappily he was more—he was hasty in his temper ; further, he had a way of asking, or rather ordering, people to do various things which did

not tend to the general peacefulness of his establishment. All these faults I saw and in addition heard, but in the arrogance of my heart I thought they could never affect me.

“I can get on with Gooday,” “I take no notice of Gooday,” “Gooday never puts me out,” were the words I had continually on my tongue, and so I went airily and jauntily on my way, feeling I was on the straight road to fortune.

One evening Mr. Gooday came bustling into the office where his foreman was not, and where, contrary to custom, I was.

“Is that you, Bruce?” he said. “Just write a line to the South-Western people, bidding them call to-morrow for half a ton of flour to go to Woking.” This was not in the least my business, but I never made any difficulty about doing what I was asked, and so I dashed off in a fine flowing hand—I write very well indeed, so well that those who run may read—on one of our printed memorandum forms—

“Sir,—Please collect to-morrow, *without fail*, ^{1½} ton flour for Woking, and oblige,

“Yours faithfully,

“SAMUEL GOODAY, pr. R. B.

“To Goods Manager, Nine Elms Station, S.W.”

I put this in an envelope, sealed it, posted it. "No mistake about that," I said to myself, as I dropped the epistle into the nearest pillar-box. Aforetime there had been mistakes about the non-postage of letters, but I was determined my missive to the South-Western should not miscarry. The Woking man was a good customer. I had got orders from him myself, and his half-ton must go as requested.

I started on a long round next morning, and did not return to Essex Wharf till after two o'clock, when the sight of Dod Street blocked from end to end with South-Western vans filled me with amazement.

"Trade is brisk down East to-day," I thought; and I wondered who amongst our neighbours could be sending away such a lot of goods, perfectly unsuspicious that Essex Wharf was the scene of this demonstration.

As I walked along Dod Street to our place it was borne in upon me that something out of the common and disagreeable had occurred.

The faces and gestures of the carmen—their language, which sounded unparliamentary—the delight of various boys, who, having scented mischief afar off, were appearing from all quarters—a tendency

observable in the passers-by to stop and gape at something they could not see—told my practised eye a row of some sort was in progress.

“What is it?” I asked a man who was so standing.

“I don’t know, I am sure,” he answered, according to the invariable custom of men who stop and gape.

At that moment a great hubbub at the door of our own office attracted my attention, and before I had time to consider what it could be, from afar I beheld Mr. Gooday, hot and angry, without a hat on his head or a coat on his back, in the very act of hurling a stalwart carman under the feet of his own horses.

“Do you want to commit murder?” I cried, pushing my way through a knot of excited and furious drivers, all apparently thirsting for Mr. Gooday’s blood.

“I do!” that gentleman shouted; “I do, and I will! I’ll show them whether I’ll be made a laughing-stock! I’ll teach them and their d——d——d’d company to crack jokes at my expense!”

“But what is wrong—what have they done?”

“Done! They have sent Lord knows how many vans to collect half a ton of flour——”

“Seventy-two tons of flour,” corrected one of the men.

“That is too good,” I said, at the same time trying to push Mr. Gooday inside. “There is some mistake; load up the half-ton——”

“That’s at the City by this time,” shrieked Mr. Gooday. “A fellow came about one, wanting as much flour as he could take. I sent him away with ten hundredweight, and ever since van after van has been pulling up to collect seventy-two tons. I’ll seventy-two ton them,” he added, in a fresh burst of fury; “I’ll have justice if there’s law in England.”

“So will I,” put in the assaulted carman.

“Look at them,” spluttered Mr. Gooday, enraged almost beyond the power of speech. “The vagabonds think it fine fun, I daresay. Look at the way the street is blocked, and there are more round the corner, and more to come on; and see the crowd and the police. Now, you ruffians, will you go or will you not?”

“We can’t have the traffic stopped in this way, Mr. Gooday,” said a sergeant, crossing the street at the peril of his life.

“Then clear it,” answered that gentleman.

“I believe every one of my ribs are broken,” complained the carman I had seen ejected.

I gave all the drivers a look and sign that proved sufficiently intelligible, and at last, by dint of force and persuasion, having got Mr. Gooday inside, closed the door, leaving the police to deal with the obstruction as best they could.

“Give me my coat,” cried my principal, who was still almost choking with passion. “Where is my coat? The rascals sha’n’t have it all their own way. I’ll go to Nine Elms and lodge a complaint. I’ll have them discharged, every man of them, without a character. I’ll sue the company for damages; not another pound of my flour shall they carry.” And so, like Saul, breathing forth threatenings, he departed upon his mission, spite of all endeavours to detain him.

“Eh! Mester Bruce, but yon’s a dreadful man when he loses grip of his wits,” remarked Mr. Snodgrass. “I stood just trembling in my shoes, and as to control him I might as well have tried to control the north wind. Ye’ll stay till he comes back? I’d like well to have your company till this has all blown by.”

To Mr. Snodgrass’s great relief I said I would

stop, and sat down to hear his account of the proceedings.

“I had my hat on to go and get a bite,” he began with plaintive seriousness, “when a carman met me and said he could manage a couple of ton, and the other vans would follow as quick as they could.

“Mr. Gooday on this stepped forward and told him half a ton was all he had to take, and after a good deal of talk and some grumbling, he went away with it, sticking out hard and fast the manager understood it was seventy-two tons had to be collected.

“Before he was out of the street up comes another van for more flour, and then another, and another to the back of that, and still they keep coming, till the long and the last of it was Gooday got neither to hold nor to bind—I may say he was beside himself; the more vans drew up, and the more men walked in wanting their loads out of seventy-two tons of flour, the worse he got. He did swear awful. I don’t know I ever heard such swearing; it wasn’t to be imagined; and the men at last turned rusty and used bad language back again, and they threeped on him it was seventy-two

tons had to be collected, and he threeped on them it was half a ton for Woking, till you couldn't have heard yourself speak, there was such a din among them.

"What beats me is what the meaning of it all can be, for the railway wouldn't put a joke like that on anybody. It was you sent the note. Are you sure you fell into no mistake?"

"I am sure I fell into no mistake at all. I said half a ton. They seem to have made a fine mull of the matter at Nine Elms. Somebody there will have a bad time of it," I answered, with that serenity the contemplation of any misfortune not one's own always imparts.

"If you would wait here a minute, I'd go and break my fast," suggested Mr. Snodgrass, and accordingly he went out to perform this feat, while I looked at the newspapers.

It was much more than an hour before Mr. Snodgrass returned, looking all the better for his absence.

"He's no back then?" he asked, interrogatively.

"Couldn't be," I replied. But the words had barely passed my lips when Mr. Gooday entered the office, and stood looking at me with a lower-

ing brow and forced calm of manner which indicated danger.

Neither Mr. Snodgrass nor I spoke. We knew a storm was impending, and it hushed us into silence.

“ Well,” he began, addressing me, “ are you going out, or are you waiting for me to kick you out? Leave these premises, sir, and never let me see your owl’s face inside them again. Will you do as I bid you,” he went on, the sound of his own voice, as was usual, lashing him to a furious gust of rage, “ before I mark you? Are you set to make me do you an injury? ”

For once my tongue served me a coward’s trick. I could not have spoken had my life depended on it.

Not so Mr. Snodgrass. “ For the Lord’s sake go, Mr. Bruce! ” he entreated. “ Whatever you have done, don’t anger him further. If you do he’ll have your blood on his hands.”

“ That I will,” panted out Mr. Gooday, moving a step towards me. “ I wonder I have kept them off him so long.”

“ You hear, Mr. Bruce; can’t you see he’s desperate? Come, I’ll show you the road to the door, as you don’t seem rightly to know it,” and,

only too thankful of the excuse to get out of his employer's way, Mr. Snodgrass pushed me across the office and into the street, where, for greater security, he remained himself.

Next morning I was at Nine Elms before the first clerk made his appearance.

“What was the mistake about that flour in Dod Street, yesterday, is it ?” he repeated, as he unlocked his desk. “Who are you that want to know ?”

“It was I wrote the note asking you to collect.”

“Oh ! it was, was it. A nice hash you made.”

“How ?”

“Why you wrote seventy-two tons as plain as possible.”

“I didn't ; I wrote half a ton.”

“You did. Your master saw it in a minute—perfectly clear. No mistake. You carried your stroke on, and made as good a seven as anyone could wish to see.”

It was e'en so. I saw the memorandum later in the day, and was forced to concede the point. My flowing hand had at last landed me in a very pretty mess. Gone were my hopes of fortune, gone the situation which suited me. There

was an end of the cheerful chats ending in good orders, an end also of those little commissions which had been so grateful to my impecuniosity.

Further, I could not tell whether the cost of sending those vans, horses, and carmen would fall eventually on me.

“Man,” said Mr. Snodgrass when next I met him, “you may be thankful you escaped with a whole skin. He had it in his mind to slay you that night.”

Some time elapsed before I sufficiently recovered my spirits to insert the advertisement to which I instinctively turned a month ago.

With curiosity I awaited the eager replies I felt sure I should receive.

I had fifty, of which twenty-four were from the promoters of as many different companies, each of which required a secretary prepared to deposit from one to five hundred pounds—eighteen from gentlemen who had good businesses they wished to extend, properties they wanted to develop, or inventions they desired to patent. In each case they stated a merely nominal investment would ensure a large income.

One City house wanted a clerk able to conduct its correspondence in four languages, salary

eighty-five pounds a year; six contained circulars from registry offices and people who negotiate partnerships.

The fiftieth was directed, in a hand I knew well, to Mr. Robert Bruce.

“The hour so long dreaded has come, my dear mother,” I remarked, with a levity which hid an aching heart. “Mr. Gooday is evidently determined to make me pay for that mistake of the South-Western people.”

“For that mistake of yours, you mean,” returned Mrs. Philomena Bruce, tartly. “It is nothing more than you deserve, however. If you had only taken my advice, and tried to improve your handwriting, instead of making a boast of that dreadful scrawl, you need never have got yourself into such a scrape. But what does the man say?”

I opened the letter with fear and trembling.

“Well?” asked my parent.

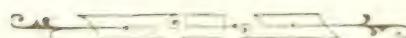
“He says,” I read triumphantly, “‘I see you are still out of a berth, and as I do not think you are likely to get one in a hurry, you had better call round and talk matters over with me. I am perfectly willing to let bygones be bygones, but I’ll never trust you to write another line.’”

How rejoiced the bakers and the bakers' wives, the corn-chandlers, their mothers, their daughters, their sisters were to see me once more I must leave the reader to imagine.

I feel also compelled to slur over the affecting reconciliation which took place between myself and Mr. Gooday. I tried to make light of the matter with Mr. Snodgrass, but it was of no use endeavouring to hoodwink him,

“Ah, lad,” he said, “you may laugh now and say it was a good joke, but it was a serious joke that evening, when, if you were laughing at all, it was on the other side of your mouth.”

Perhaps it was, but he need not have reminded me of that.



THE MISSES POPKIN.

CHAPTER I.

TOLD BY MR. MARGISON.

YOU should know them, dear reader—you really should—not because they are great, or grand, or clever, or rich, or beautiful, but simply because they are unique.

They are like one of the bits of china by which people, now-a-days, set such store, cracked very possibly, but none the less rare or valuable for all that.

When I first had the honour of making their acquaintance, which was, indeed, directly after I settled in Willowsdale, they did not strike me as so peculiar. Just as a vase, commonplace though it may seem to a casual observer, develops each day fresh beauties in the eyes of the possessor who has leisure to study its perfections, so the idiosyncrasies of the Misses Popkin unfold under the appreciative gaze of friend-

ship, presenting each hour fresh and delightful complications and unexpected eccentricities.

To meet them once in a way at a party, or in a railway carriage, or on a morning visit, or over a cup of that remarkable tea which is generally offered one ice cold at a kettledrum, is much on a par with trying to "do" the Giant's Causeway in ten minutes, or taking a rapid walk through Westminster Abbey. All of them require time and study. During the course of ten long years I had been studying the Misses Popkin diligently, and yet, I confess, they have now surprised me with an entirely different range of character to that in which I supposed they excelled. Latterly they have come out as —— But I must not anticipate.

Ten years since, and, indeed, for several years before that period, there were four Misses Popkin: there are four still. Without claiming any gift of prophecy, I think I may say that, till death takes one, or other, or all, there will continue to be four. It is difficult to determine the age at which a woman ceases, in her own opinion, to be likely to marry; but in the opinion of other people the Misses Popkin have crossed that border line.

They are no longer young, they are, indeed, far removed from youth; and yet there is a juvenility about their feelings. Time has not furrowed their hearts, though its plough may have passed over their faces; it has not dulled their sensibilities, though their limbs are stiffer than they were, say, at fifteen; it has not paralyzed their tongues, though, to give fair play to that useful member, they have been compelled, some of them, to purchase fresh teeth.

"We never mean to feel old," said Miss Jane only the other day, with sprightly coquetry. "I do think old people are generally *so dreadful*."

Now, dear Miss Jane, though the third of the unique quartette, is not a mere child in years by any means. She is —she must be—well—well, let that pass. Somebody said "women and music should never be dated," so we will not date the Misses Popkin, except by inference.

Ten years since, Miss Popkin, though still quite young in feeling, wore a front, and had given up, so she said, all thoughts of matrimony. She and Miss Catherine and Miss Jane all meant to live three old maids together, and never to marry. For Essie, they could not answer. She

was the youngest of the flock, the junior by years of all, and it would be wrong to bind her. Marriage they considered a mistake. Still, if Essie chose a gentleman possessed of nice tastes, they would not restrain her because she held different opinions to those at which they had arrived.

It will be inferred from this that Miss Essie was quite a young thing, of nine-and-thirty, or thereabouts, whom her sisters treated as a perfect baby, and whom they looked upon as scarcely fit to be trusted out alone.

In Willowsdale there was a gentleman whom they supposed to be distractedly in love with her, a Mr. Ancidell, who had been a great traveller; who had also, according to their ideas, seen everything there was to be seen on earth, but who, like many other quiet men, was shy, and required a certain amount of encouragement which “poor dear Essie” was not sufficiently bold to give him.

Mr. Ancidell, who had faced many lions and knew his way about the world and the world’s drawing-rooms and the fair ladies who adorn them as well as most people, was supposed to be afflicted with an excess of diffidence when he came into the presence of the fair Esther.

Every one in the parish knew, however, that the Misses Popkin expected him to propose to her, and he was quite aware of this expectation himself.

“If she would only put the question plainly to me, that is plainly in words,” he said one day to the present writer, “I should know what to do.”

“You like her very much?” was the hesitating interrogation.

“Very much indeed, and so I do them all.” With which remark he went off laughing.

A sad fellow! a graceless, unthankful scamp to have such kindness shown him, so much hospitality given him!

If I do not describe the house I can’t describe the Misses Popkin. It was their own—a person could not be in their company five minutes without learning that fact. If you admired the wisteria Miss Popkin said it had grown wonderfully. “When we bought this house there was not a creeper or rose tree upon it.” If a newcomer, surprised by the size of the pretty hall, which opened into a good conservatory, made some remark concerning it, one of the sisters was sure to tell him—

“Ah, we had it altered when we came here. We did away with one small room, and threw it into the hall. That is the advantage of living in a house belonging to one: the money spent in improvements never seems wasted.”

It was the same with everything about the place. The Misses Popkin never suffered a visitor to remain in ignorance of their ownership, nor allowed an acquaintance to forget the house was theirs by right of purchase.

“If we wanted to sell The Larches to-morrow,” said Miss Jane to me on one occasion, “we could get double what we gave for the dear place.”

For answer I inclined my head. I knew more about the value of house property than Miss Jane, and was aware there is a considerable difference between selling and buying.

It was not a residence I should ever have dreamed of purchasing, but most persons considered it desirable in the extreme.

A fair-sized house for a family of moderate means. The regulation drawing-room, the regulation dining-room, the necessary breakfast-room, and the little snugger Miss Catherine, busy with her Dorcas accounts and charity garments,

declared to be such a “perfect treasure;” eight bed-chambers, and the “usual domestic offices”—not a bad house as regarded size; set sufficiently back from the road, and approached by a drive bounded on the one side by a tiny belt of plantation, and on the other skirting a grass plot adorned with a fine larch, a weeping ash tree, an evergreen oak and a sun-dial.

There were two gates—one by which the carriage visitor could come in, the other by which he could go. He might not return, however, by that which had given him entrance. No coachman could have turned on the gravel sweep in front of the house without endangering the windows on the one hand, or knocking down the sun-dial on the other.

Behind the house there was a flower garden; to the left lay a paddock, to the right a stable yard, coach-house, &c. At the back of these outbuildings, the Misses Popkin informed all visitors, they had a good acre of kitchen ground.

Not a bad little property taken altogether. The maiden ladies were proud of it, and felt no shame in showing their pride.

For the rest, anything more like a stiff drawing copy never existed. The moment the

eye rested upon it the hand felt impelled to pull out a pencil and scrap of paper and sketch it. The high-pitched gable, the two steps up to the kitchen door in the corner, the fanciful chimneys, the regulation shrubs, the accustomed larches—all these things were almost irresistible, as were also the sleek cat coming out of the stable yard, the dog lying outside the kennel, and the cook in pattens discoursing to the “odd man” pumping water.

Here, however, all likeness to anything suggestive of nature or picturesqueness ceased.

The place was painfully trim; there was no stir of life or litter of use about it. No garden-roller was ever permitted to remain, when not in use, outside the tool-shed; the pigeons cooed and strutted along the roof of the empty stable; the fowls were relegated to a dreary run at the end of the paddock; there was not a weed in the garden, or a scrap of moss on any walk about The Larches. An artist if set down there must have gone crazy, and anyone possessed of a taste for untidy comfort have taken refuge in an old tumbledown barn standing in a field a little further down the road.

It was the same inside the house, a line and

plummet mathematical accuracy—Miss Popkin's seat, Miss Catherine's chair, Miss Jane's foot-stool. You knew all these things and kept clear of them as you entered the drawing-room. As for Miss Essie, she had, of course, her girlish accomplishments; she daubed in water-colours and embroidered in wools, and sung a little and played a little, but she was tidy through all—never a piece of music out of the Canterbury, or a pattern lying on the table, or a drawing to be found except on the easel or in the portfolio.

“Order,” said Miss Popkin, for the benefit of her niece, “is Heaven's first law,” and I daresay Miss Popkin, as well as the individual who first made that remark, is, in the main, right.

Only the niece fell out of rank: she was not orderly.

“Oh! dear,” Miss Catherine would say piteously, “what would your poor papa think if he could see you?” Ah! what indeed? For my own part, I don't think any papa would have desired to look upon a fairer picture.

I had known the Misses Popkin some six years when this niece came to live with them. I saw her a few days after her arrival, and found her a quaint young creature, clad in dresses too short

for her; hair closely cropped, possessed of timid manners, a sad face, and, as her aunt truly said, with “a great want of development about her.”

She had been at school—a day school—till her mother’s death, and now, explained Miss Popkin, “she has not a creature in the world except ourselves. Some day, moreover, I suppose she will be an heiress, and we must see she keeps up her studies.”

They did that sedulously. Miss Kitty was forced to continue her studies. She practised in the morning, and she was at drawing in the forenoon; after luncheon, if one asked for her, she was at her French exercises, and really, except in the evenings, nobody could catch a glimpse of her. She was sent to bed about nine o’clock, and never allowed to go out to any parties whatsoever.

“Till our brother returns from India we do not wish to introduce her,” explained Miss Popkin, and from that phrase we understood the ladies expected Mr. Popkin would leave her all his money.

We supposed that gentleman to be rolling in riches and awaited his return—which we had been long led to expect—with great anxiety not unmixed with awe. He was not Kitty’s papa, that

gentleman being a younger brother, coming between Miss Jane and Miss Essie, and, though he married a lady of good birth and old family, there was something about the match the Misses Popkin had not relished.

“But for us,” they said, “little Kitty stands quite alone in the world. Our dear brother, moreover, seems well disposed towards her, and will probably make her his heiress.”

If the absent Mr. Popkin had been the Maharajah Duleep Singh we could not have been led to entertain higher ideas of his wealth than in that case.

When he returned, the stable was to be put in requisition, the house filled with guests, the Misses Popkin were to go on the continent—they meant to take a house in town—and as by that time, which might have meant a year, never, or half a lifetime, Kitty would be almost grown up—who knew?—more unlikely things than a presentation at Court had occurred to girls possessed of rich uncles.

During the whole of this period Mr. Ancidel had been going backwards and forwards, to and from The Larches—now he wanted to present a plant to the conservatory—again he was invited to view some of the contents of the latest

box received from India. It was impossible to avoid noticing that Miss Essie Popkin grew livelier and brighter, and it was equally impossible for Willowsdale to remain blind to the fact that the eligible bachelor affected The Larches more and more.

True there was a disparity—and that upon the wrong side—but then, as Miss Popkin remarked, “Dear Essie is so young in heart she will always remain a girl,” whilst all the sisters declared, “Mr. Ancidell is old both in appearance and manner—any one who didn’t know him intimately might imagine he was quite middle-aged!”

Being unprotected females, and feeling that ladies so placed “couldn’t be too particular,” the Misses Popkin did not give dinner parties—indeed they did not give parties of any kind.

When their brother returned, they hinted, Willowsdale might expect a reign of mad dissipation to set in at The Larches—but till that blest period arrived the most any friend could expect was a cup of tea or a glass of wine.

Mr. Ancidell partook of more cups of tea and glasses of wine than any one else, and it was felt that after a fashion the Misses Popkin had bought

him for Esther—and that if he refused to fulfil the bargain he would act shabbily towards them.

Apparently the matter did not strike him in this light, for he continued to visit at The Larches, took all the cups of tea and slices of bread and butter the ladies offered him—drank a considerable amount of the very good sherry they decanted and ate whole pounds of biscuits, and yet never proposed.—No.—Though he sat in their drawing-room by the hour together, and talked of his adventures by land and water—the while Miss Popkin knitted and Miss Catherine made up her comfortable garments for the poor, and Miss Jane embroidered, and Miss Essie painted fire-screens, and that waif and stray, Kitty, let her work fall idly in her lap while she listened open-eyed to his stories of countries and people very far away.

“It was friendly, but it wasn’t business.” Miss Popkin no doubt felt this, for she decided it would be only wise to give him the opportunity he was evidently awaiting.

“We will ask him to dinner,” said the astute lady; and Mr. Ancidell was asked to dinner accordingly, but unhappily nothing came of it.

As usual he made himself very agreeable, and it

gave the four ladies quite a thrill to have a gentleman sitting at table with them.

“When our brother comes home,” said Miss Popkin, “he will be glad to find a friend with whom he can exchange ideas. If it were not for you, Mr. Ancidell, I should dread his return. He would feel quite stultified in Willowsdale!”

This was uncomplimentary to me—I felt it unjust when Ancidell repeated the conversation, but I made allowances. Of course the Misses Popkin couldn’t imagine I meant to marry Essy, and undoubtedly they never felt more positive of anything in their lives than that Mr. Ancidell did.

He was therefore, as I have said, asked to dinner; as I haven’t said, the Misses Popkin left him to sit over his wine.

He made no effort to stay their departure, on the contrary—with quite a “chivalrous mien,” as they decided, he held the door open for them to go.

“As it’s getting so late, Kitty, my dear,” said Miss Popkin, when they entered the drawing-room, “I think you had better go to bed—your roses will soon fade—if you don’t take care of them while you are still a mere child.”

“Good-night, then, aunt,” said Miss Kitty, and

after kissing her three other remaining aunts, she went straight off to her own room, which was situated in the gable covered by the wisteria mentioned in an early part of this story, and commanded a good view of the paddock in The Larches and the fowl run.

After a time Mr. Ancidell came into the drawing-room and partook of coffee—then Miss Essie showed him her latest sketch and trilled out her newest song. Whilst these diversions were in progress—one by one the three elder Misses Popkin framed some excuse to leave the room, and so at last Mr. Ancidell found himself alone with the fair Esther.

Certainly he had his opportunity now. Any man might have proposed a score of times during the period Miss Essie's sisters remained absent. Ample leisure was afforded him not merely to ask the fair enslaver to bless his life, but to talk about settlements and their future establishment; the plan of an European campaign might have been laid down, so long did the elder ladies remain invisible; but at last they reappeared, coming into the room as they had left it—one by one—with a very good assumption of innocent unconsciousness upon their faces.

Mr. Ancidell did not look well pleased, however; they all noticed that. When they entered, he was standing beside the chimney-piece, with half the length of the room between himself and the lady, and when almost immediately afterwards he took his departure, he did not ask them for one word of congratulation, neither did he greet the spinsters as “sisters.”

Surely—surely Esther could not have refused him. They well understood how coy she was—how maidenly; but still, she was not a simpleton, and they could not go on asking him to dinner, and giving him opportunities to propose, unless Essie did her part. The hall door had not closed behind him, when with one voice the three ladies asked breathlessly:

“Well, what did he say?”

“He said nothing,” answered Miss Esther, with a crushing sense of failure in her tone.

“Nothing!” the trio chorussed.

“Of—of that sort I mean,” explained their sister. “Why did you stay away so long? He seemed uncomfortable, I thought, and almost cross.”

“But he could not sit all that time and not speak a word,” suggested Miss Popkin. “What did he say, Essie?”

“Oh! he talked about the weather, and Mr. Margison’s gout, and the sermon last Sunday, and said he thought of running over to Paris next week, and he asked where Kitty was.”

“Yes; and then——”

“I told him she had gone to bed, and he said, ‘Why, is she ill?’ in an absent sort of manner.”

“He could not think she was ill,” remarked Miss Popkin.

“I don’t know; he seemed surprised when I said we rarely allowed her to sit up after nine. He paid little attention to the matter apparently, however, for when I asked him if he did not think she grew, he answered, ‘Who?—oh! you mean Miss Kitty. No, I have not noticed that she does.’

“I told him we thought she was getting quite tall, and that we told her often in fun she would soon be a young lady, and that we must really cease calling her Kitty.”

“What did he say to that?” asked Miss Catherine.

“He did not say anything. He never seemed at his ease all the time you were away.”

“Dear, dear!” exclaimed Miss Popkin, “what a thing it is to be so shy! I really fail to see

that we can do anything more until William returns. Gentlemen are able to give hints to each other. I am sure I should not hesitate to speak to him openly if I felt it would be proper for me to do so; but I am afraid it would not. Although I am old enough to be your mother," went on Miss Popkin, magnanimously; "still, you see, Essie, I am not your mother."

"No," sighed Essie, thinking, perhaps, that if she were it would not make much difference.

Even Willowsdale had failed to learn whence the Misses Popkins derived their income. Except The Larches, no one ever heard them speak of property. They did not, so far as we knew, go in for shares, or ground-rents, or foreign loans, or speculations of any sort. They never seemed to lose money, and they never spoke of making any. The popular belief appeared to be that they had ten thousand pounds each in the Three per Cents.; but I felt doubtful upon this point. Twice a year they went up to London, and Miss Jane slipped out on one occasion that they were going to get their money. Now, I knew that they could not be going to draw their dividends, because the time for that pleasing task had long been past.

It was no business of mine how they had invested their capital, and I did not try to make it mine, only I felt satisfied they did not derive their income from the Three per Cents.

They paid with the regularity of clock-work. From year's end to year's end I do not think there could have been the variation of ten pounds in their expenditure. So much for house-keeping, for taxes, for wages, for the church, for the poor, for dress, for the week's outing twice a year to London, and another fortnight's sojourn at some watering-place. Miss Popkin kept the accounts, Miss Jane managed domestic affairs, Miss Catherine attended to the poor, while Miss Essie, who was still too young to devote herself to matters which were merely useful, furnished the establishment with the lighter graces of existence, with accomplishments and fashions, and trivial conversation, and general ease and elegance of deportment.

As for Miss Kitty, you always met her where it seemed least likely ; the girl would be found swimming the retriever a few miles up the river, comforting some naughty child who had been getting into a scrape, dandling a disreputable-looking baby, remonstrating with the donkey-

boys about their cruelty, or bribing the village lads not to stone the cats, and pelt the frogs, and kick the dogs.

I am quite satisfied the Misses Popkin had only the vaguest idea of their niece's proceedings.

They would have fainted had they known one half of her doings. I knew, because my work took me into all sorts of places, and amongst all manners of people, but except the poor and needy I do not think any one else understood the mode in which Miss Kitty employed her time.

When her aunts went to London she did not accompany them—a vague sort of promise was indeed given her that if she were a good girl, some day she might be taken to the metropolis—but Kitty told me she did not care to go.

“We lived in London once,” she said; “mamma and I, we did not like it—the country is best.”

One hot afternoon, I was pacing along the road which led past The Larches, when in the paddock I beheld the Misses Popkin's niece exercising an unfortunate retriever, who, save when she unfastened his collar, was always upon the chain.

I went up close to the fence, and called her by name.

I can see her now hurrying across the field, coming laughing towards me.

“I am so glad to see you, Mr. Margison,” she said, stretching out her gloveless hand. “Isn’t it warm?” and she took off her hat and stood swinging it backwards and forwards, while the sun shone down upon her through the leaves and branches of a great oak tree.

I have said she was a fair picture; but no words could tell you how beautiful a girl I thought her. She had the most brilliant complexion and the darkest eyes I ever saw. And yet they were not black or brown—they were grey: soft, deep, dark, sparkling, sympathetic, tender. I have never seen such eyes elsewhere—they were innocent as those of a child—they were earnest as those of a woman.

“What are you going to do this evening?”

“I can’t tell yet,” she replied. “Perhaps play—perhaps draw; if I feel industrious, I may even do a little needlework.”

“Have you dined?”

“Hours ago,” she answered. “When the aunties are away, I always get cook to send me up a tray when the servants have their dinner. That does not seem so dreadful as sitting down all by oneself.”

“In that case I wonder if you would take tea with me.”

“I shall be delighted,” she answered. “I am so much obliged to you for asking me.”

“You do not think your aunts would object,” I ventured.

“Why should they?” she asked gravely. But there was a twinkle in her eyes, and a smile dimpling her face which contradicted the seriousness of her question. “I am so young, you know, Mr. Margison, that it does not matter much where I go, or what I do.”

Never before, never once, had it occurred to me that the peculiarities of the Misses Popkin appeared ludicrous to their niece, but her words and her smile, and that twinkle made me feel vaguely doubtful and uneasy.

“If you were not so young,” I said, “I should not have been so bold as to ask you.”

“What a blessing it is to be a mere chit,” she answered, still with the light dancing in her eyes.

“What time shall I come—when shall you be ready for me—and may I, Oh! may I pour out the tea?”

A man must have been of adamant to withstand her.

“Of course you shall do anything and everything you like,” I said. “Will half-past six be too early for you?”

“No, you may expect to see me at half-past six, dressed in all my best—I can’t tell you how much I shall like to come.”

And she put her hand over the fence and squeezed mine, and once again I thought that some day she would break hearts and that it was nice to be so old as I am!

Half-past six came, and with it Miss Kitty. She had dressed herself in all her best—in the white gown she wore on Sundays, with some soft lace round her neck and hands, with heavy gold bracelets on her wrists, and a Venetian chain twisted into an ornament for her throat.

“They were mamma’s,” she said aptly, seeing my eyes rest upon these adornments. “I thought I would put them on to do you honour.”

She had put something else on with them too, or else scales had fallen from before my eyes. She had donned years of age. It was not a girl who sat pouring out the tea, but a woman—no child playing beside the stream of life, but a maiden longing to dip her fair feet in the treacherous waters.

How charming she made herself—how divinely she played—with what expression she sang—how well she talked—how sweet she seemed walking, her hand within my arm, in the dim twilight, as we sauntered through the garden, odorous with the scent of the night flowers.

“How old, Mr. Margison, do you suppose I am?” she asked at last. It was so strange a question that, for a moment, I had a difficulty in answering it.

“About fifteen or sixteen,” I replied at last.

She burst out laughing. “I am nearly twenty,” she said. “Don’t you think I might soon be allowed to wear long dresses and let my hair grow?”

What remark I should, or, indeed, could have made in return may never now be recorded; because at this moment there came along one of the soft moss-covered walks a person — my house-keeper.

“If you please, sir,” she said, and I noticed her voice seemed a little strange, “Miss Popkin have come from London, and Miss Kitty is wanted back directly.”

“Back directly!” cried Miss Kitty “nobody is ill, is there?”

“Not as I am aware of, miss,” answered Mrs Hall with grave propriety.

She had her hat on in a moment and her little scarf around her shoulders.

“Good-bye, dear Mr. Margison,” she said, taking both my hands in hers. “How can I ever thank you sufficiently for this delightful evening?”

“I am going home with you,” I answered, giving her my arm. “You have made yourself so charming, Miss Kitty, that I shall not part with you till I am compelled.”

I spoke lightly, but my mind misgave me. What could have brought the Misses Popkin home on the very day of their departure? Such a thing had never happened before.

Evidently Kitty did not share my apprehensions.

“I suppose that aunties have found their accustomed lodgings occupied,” she said. “I heard aunt Jane say they ought sooner to have written to secure them.”

Most fervently I trusted no worse calamity than the inability to procure lodgings had brought them home so suddenly.

“Come in, Mr. Margison, pray,” entreated Miss Kitty, as we stood under the sheltering porch.

“My aunts are in the drawing-room, Mary, I suppose,” she went on, addressing the trim maid who opened the door.

“No, miss. They are upstairs—they have had news from their brother.”

“From uncle!” repeated Kitty. “He is coming back then, no doubt—how delightful!”

“I do not think so,” said Mary, and then, as the girl was about to pass her, she cried, “Oh! Miss Kitty, don’t go up to them with that smiling face. My mistresses are in great trouble. The gentleman is dead!”

I was walking towards my home when I met Mr. Ancidell.

“Heard the news?” he asked, after the first greetings were over.

I told him that I had, and how sorry I felt for the Misses Popkin.

“Why, what is the matter with them—they have no money in the house, have they?”

We seemed to be playing a little at cross purposes; but I merely said, “The Misses Popkin’s was not a pecuniary trouble. Their brother is dead.” I added, “He died very suddenly!”

“Then Miss Kitty will be an heiress immediately,” he remarked, with a little bitterness. “I

hope they will have her mourning made properly."

"Mine is a bit of City news," he went on immediately. "Hill and Jones—the great East India people—have gone for over a million of money, and people say there won't be twopence in the pound."

CHAPTER II.

IT was six months after. I still walked about Willowsdale, and Mr. Ancidell also remained there, though he often talked of going back to Africa, or of taking a tour through South America.

"I get dreadfully tired of this stupid place," he remarked, alluding of course to our village.

"You feel lost, no doubt, without the youngest Miss Popkin," I remarked.

He looked at me curiously for a minute, then said—"The fair Essie, that is it, no doubt. By the bye, how are they now? Have you heard anything about them lately?"

I had; that very morning a letter reached me from Miss Popkin stating that she and her sisters desired either to sell The Larches or to let it on a long lease.

They did not think of returning to Willows-

dale; for the present their plans were somewhat uncertain. They might go abroad or remain for the winter at the watering-place from which she dated, but they had no thought of again residing at The Larches.

“It would be painful for us now to do so,” explained Miss Popkin; “the health of my second sister is far from good, and I do not feel very strong myself.”

“Oh!” commented Mr. Ancidell. “Want to sever all connection with Willowsdale, evidently. I suppose that old Hindoo”—such was his irreverent mode of speaking of the late respectable Mr. Popkin—“left a pot of money behind him. Well, they need not have cut us so completely, no matter how rich they are. I am sure I never wanted any share of their wealth. And so you are to have the treat of getting the Larches off their hands for them, I suppose.”

“Yes,” I said, “I am to do the best I can for them, and arrange for an auction to take place shortly.”

They left it all to me. For six months their house had stood vacant. They had wished to let it furnished for a short time till “they recovered from the shock of their brother’s sudden

death," but it was not easy to let houses furnished in Willowsdale, and so now they determined to get rid of the place altogether.

It was a blow to me I confess. I had grown to like the Misses Popkin. They were very odd, but they suited my quiet homely ways, and I once hoped I suited them. They were wont to consult me about all the little trifles that make up the sum of life in a tranquil existence such as that we led; and I had looked forward, I confess, with hope and pleasure, to the coming of the man I never could meet now, and who would, I fancied, have given a little fillip to the undoubted monotony of our proceedings.

Well, it was not to be. The Misses Popkin were gone, and so was Miss Kitty. Doubtless long ere this she had been metamorphosed into a fashionable young lady whose hair would soon be long enough to arrange *à la mode*, who wore dresses sweeping the ground, and could not spare a word or a thought for the old friends that had loved her winning ways and admired her winsome face.

Mr. Ancidell was very bitter about the estrangement which Mr. Popkin's death had caused.

"I wonder if they still think I want to marry

the charming Esther, and are keeping her out of my way?" he laughed. "I have a great mind to run down to that outlandish place Miss Popkin dated from and call upon them."

"Miss Popkin would look upon you as a wolf come to prey upon her lamb," I answered thoughtfully, for indeed, as I have said, the line of conduct the ladies had pursued since their brother's death pained and vexed me.

"Sheep, you mean, don't you?" amended Mr. Ancidell, and shortly after he walked away.

Some weeks passed before I saw him again. I had arranged for the auction to take place almost immediately, and inserted some advertisements relative to the desirable detached residence known as The Larches; there was a board at each entrance gate stating the place was to be let or sold, when quite unexpectedly he came in one morning while I was at breakfast.

He looked well; better than he had done for a long time past. He was in good spirits and health, and declared his trip had benefited him greatly.

"By-the-bye," he said, after a little, "you may take down that notice about The Larches—the place is sold."

I looked at him incredulously. "Sold!" I repeated, "and who has bought it, pray?"

"I have," he answered.

"You?"—I uttered the word stupidly.

"Yes; I called upon Miss Popkin's solicitor as I came through London, and settled the matter with him. He promised to write to you."

"Why, what can you want with The Larches?" I asked. "I thought you were so fond of 'The Cottage.'"

"So I was, but it wouldn't be large enough for me now," he said. I looked at him again, and a sudden light flashed across me.

"You are going to be married," I guessed.

He nodded. "Wish me joy!" he cried.

"I am sure I do, heartily," I returned. "But who is the lady?"

"Can't you form any idea?"

"It is not Miss Popkin, is it?" I hesitated.

"Yes, it is Miss Popkin," and he laughed joyously. "Don't look so sorrowful, man," he added. "She will make me a very good wife, don't you think so?"

I answered, "I had no doubt of that—she was a very estimable person—the only thing—the only doubt——"

“Yes, go on,” said Mr. Ancidell encouragingly.
“I shan’t feel offended, no matter what you say.”

“I was only going to mention the disparity in your ages—but if you do not mind of course——”

“Oh! I don’t mind,” he answered, “and she does not either.”

“I never supposed she would,” I retorted, nettled—for his merriment struck me as unseemly. It did not appear possible he could have any affection for a woman so much older than himself, and it vexed me to think that after all he should marry for money. He had not even the excuse of being poor. His means were very good indeed.

He watched me for a few moments, his features twitching with amusement.

“Cheer up, Margison,” he said at last. “After all it is not you who are going to marry her, and that reminds me you have not asked which of the ladies has so far honoured me.”

“There could only be one,” I answered sulkily.

“There could only be one,” he repeated after me. “And her name?”

“Why——. Something in his face arrested Miss Esther’s name on my lips. “You do not mean——” I gasped.

“Yes, I do—I do indeed—wish me joy. I am the happiest fellow in all the world. I fell in love with Kitty I think the first day I saw her, but I did not dare to say anything as they made such a fuss about her uncle’s money and her expectations and all that.”

“What do they say to you for carrying off the heiress now?” I asked somewhat nervously.

“My dear fellow—this in strict confidence—the uncle did not leave her anything, for the simple reason that every farthing he had was in Hill’s house. There is no doubt the failure killed him, and that was what drove the Misses Popkin away from Willowsdale. I know all about them now. Their father—the original Popkin—it appears was a tradesman in a country town. He made some money and, being ambitious, gave his children good educations and pushed himself forward at elections and so forth, till somehow he managed to get an appointment out in India for his one son and a commission for the other. He could not leave much behind him after doing all these things, so his daughters had to live as best they could upon a hundred a year.”

“Then where did they get their money?” I asked.

“I am coming to that,” he said.

“As William, the elder brother, you understand, got on in India, he began to allow them first fifty, then a hundred, then two hundred per annum till the amount he sent over grew to three hundred every six months.”

“And do you mean to say these ladies had nothing except what he gave them?”

“Nothing whatever, if we exclude The Larches. That they bought with the money left by their father. When the brother died they had not a hundred pounds of ready cash in the world, and the mourning they bought before they knew of the ruin wrought by Hill’s failure made a large hole in that. They were obliged to part with their jewellery, and when I dropped down upon them a fortnight ago, I found Kitty giving music lessons and preparing to devote herself to teaching for the remainder of her life. But she did not look dull, or sad, or discontented. Her smile was as bright and saucy as ever when she said: ‘I am glad to be able to do something for them; thankful. They were so kind to my poor mother, that if it were not a pleasure it would be my duty to work for them.’”

“Bravo, Miss Kitty,” I exclaimed.

I was so delighted about all the good news Mr. Ancidell brought that after this outburst I stretched out my hand and shook his in happy silence.

“Who was Miss Kitty’s mother?” I asked.

“A romantic girl of good family who fell in love with Captain Popkin’s handsome face. Her father renounced her—forbade anyone to mention her name before him, and she must actually have starved—for Captain Popkin left nothing but debts behind him—had not the Misses Popkin got help from their brother in India for her and given her help themselves.”

“And so you are going to buy The Larches,” I remarked, after a pause.

“I *have* bought it,” he answered.

“And do you mean to purchase the furniture?”

“I *have* purchased it,” he said.

“The Misses Popkin, then, will live in your cottage, I suppose,” I suggested.

“Not likely,” he answered, and so departed the happiest-looking man I had seen for many a long day.

All that summer there were workmen coming and going about The Larches. Additions were built, and the house re-decorated throughout,

better furniture was sent down from London, a grand piano was placed in the new drawing-room; but the curiosities Mr. Popkin had sent over from India were preserved intact, and every article by which the Misses Popkin had set especial store carefully reinstated in their former positions when the decorators, painters and the upholsterers had done their work.

Everything was now ready, and the house only waited its inhabitants.

“We are going to have a very quiet wedding,” said Mr. Ancidell, “on the seventh of next month. Here is a little note from Miss Popkin, asking you to come to it. Kitty wanted you to give her away, but I believe her maternal uncle has offered to perform the part of father. I wrote to the family, saying Kitty had accepted me, and the old man being dead, the present head of the house said he thought all causes of disagreement ought to be forgotten.

“‘I was very fond of my sister,’ he added, ‘and I have no doubt but I shall grow very fond of my niece.’”

I told Mr. Ancidell I should be only too delighted to accept the invitation, and then added curiously a question I had often put before.

“But where are the Misses Popkin going to live? I hope they will return to Willowsdale.”

“Yes, they do not mean to desert Willowsdale,” he answered.

“I suppose you’ll make over the cottage to them,” I suggested.

“No; the fact is, they are going to live with us.”

“With you!” I repeated, stupefied. “Do you think you will like the arrangement?”

“It is Kitty’s wish,” he answered, “and I would not thwart it for the world. Besides, you know, I was always very fond of the Misses Popkin.”

I felt glad—oh! very glad. Willowsdale had never seemed the same since those dear, delightful, ridiculous old ladies left it.

Time will not permit me to tell about the marriage and the breakfast, and the smiles of Miss Kitty and the tears of her aunts. I must hurry over the intervening period and return to The Larches on Christmas Day, where I had been bidden to meet the bride and bridegroom returning from the honeymoon, and Mrs. Ancidell’s uncle and Mrs. Ancidell’s aunts.

The rooms were decked with greenery, and in the hall, more lovely than she had ever been,

stood Kitty, with both hands outstretched to meet her old friend, laughing and crying, her face dimpled, but her eyes full of tears.

As for the Misses Popkin, how may I hope to describe them? In dress, they were more gorgeous than ever, and at first I thought they were more stately, but this manner I soon found was only assumed to conceal their want of self-possession.

Before dinner Miss Popkin took me aside. "I want to tell you something, Mr. Margison," she said. "I desire to make a confession. We were quite wrong before, we were indeed, and we deserved all the trouble that fell upon us for our false pride in pretending we were quite rich people, and giving no credit openly to the good brother who acted so nobly towards us. It is right for me to say this to you who have always stood our friend, and now I must tell you about our darling. Her uncle has behaved to her with the greatest kindness — made over all the fortune which would have been his sister's had she married differently. And what—what do you think, Mr. Margison? This morning she sent each of us a little note, with an order that we were to receive yearly seventy-five pounds. With the money Mr.

Ancidell paid us for this place we have therefore a hundred a year apiece so long as we live. We shall not need it, of course, but still—still—”

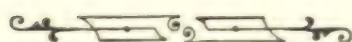
The poor lady broke down ; the most genuine tears I ever saw shed were running down her cheeks and, I believe, benefitting her soul.

“God bless Kitty !” I said, and said it from the bottom of my heart.

“Who is talking about Kitty ?” cried Mrs. Ancidell, coming forward at the moment.

“We were,” answered her aunt. “I was just telling Mr. Margison about your thought for your old aunts, and we really—really must give up calling you Kitty any longer.”

“I hope I shall never be anything else to you,” she interrupted, with a delightful smile. “John says he thinks it the prettiest name he ever heard, and uncle quite agrees with him.”



THE LAST OF SQUIRE ENNISMORE.

“DID I see it myself? No, sir; I did not see it; and my father before me did not see it; or his father before him, and he was Phil Regan, just the same as myself. But it is true, for all that; just as true as that you are looking at the very place where the whole thing happened. My great-grandfather (and he did not die till he was ninety-eight) used to tell, many and many’s the time, how he met the stranger, night after night, walking lonesome-like about the sands where most of the wreckage came ashore.”

“And the old house, then, stood behind that belt of Scotch firs?”

“Yes; a fine house it was, too. Hearing so much talk about it when a boy, my father said, made him often feel as if he knew every room in the building, though it had all fallen to ruin before he was born. None of the family ever lived in it after the Squire went away. Nobody else could be got to stop in the place. There

used to be awful noises, as if something was being pitched from the top of the great staircase down into the hall ; and then there would be a sound as if a hundred people were clinking glasses and talking all together at once. And then it seemed as if barrels were rolling in the cellars ; and there would be screeches, and howls, and laughing, fit to make your blood run cold. They say there is gold hid away in those cellars ; but not one has ever ventured to find it. The very children won't come here to play ; and when the men are ploughing the field behind, nothing will make them stay in it, once the day begins to change. When the night is coming on, and the tide creeps in on the sand, more than one thinks he has seen mighty queer things on the shore there."

"But what is it really they think they see ? When I asked my landlord to tell me the story from beginning to end, he said he could not remember it ; and, at any rate, the whole rigmarole was nonsense, put together to please strangers."

"And what is he but a stranger himself ? And how should he know about the doings of real quality like the Ennismores ? For they

were gentry, every one of them—good old stock; and as for wickedness, you might have searched Ireland through and not found their match. It is a sure thing, though, that if Riley can't tell you the story, I can; for, as I said, my own people were in it, of a manner of speaking. So, if your honour will rest yourself off your feet, on that bit of a bank, I'll set down my creel and give you the whole pedigree of how Squire Ennismore went away from Ardwinsagh."

It was a lovely day, in the early part of June; and, as the Englishman cast himself on a low ridge of sand, he looked over Ardwinsagh Bay with a feeling of ineffable content. To his left lay the Purple Headland; to his right, a long range of breakers, that went straight out into the Atlantic till they were lost from sight; in front lay the Bay of Ardwinsagh, with its bluish-green water sparkling in the summer sunlight, and here and there breaking over some sunken rock, against which the waves spent themselves in foam.

"You see how the currents set, sir? That is what makes it dangerous, for them as doesn't know the coast, to bathe here at any time, or walk when the tide is flowing. Look how the

sea is creeping in now, like a race-horse at the finish. It leaves that tongue of sand bare to the last, and then, before you could look round, it has you up to the middle. That is why I made bold to speak to you; for it is not alone on the account of Squire Ennismore the bay has a bad name. But it is about him and the old house you want to hear. The last mortal being that tried to live in it, my great-grandfather said, was a creature, by name Molly Leary; and she had neither kith nor kin, and begged for her bite and sup, sheltering herself at night in a turf cabin she had built at the back of a ditch. You may be sure she thought herself a made woman when the agent said, ‘Yes: she might try if she could stop in the house; there was peat and bog-wood,’ he told her, ‘and half-a-crown a week for the winter, and a golden guinea once Easter came,’ when the house was to be put in order for the family; and his wife gave Molly some warm clothes and a blanket or two; and she was well set up.

“ You 'may be sure she didn't choose the worst room to sleep in; and for a while all went quiet, till one night she was wakened by feeling the bedstead lifted by the four corners, and shaken

like a carpet. It was a heavy four-post bedstead, with a solid top: and her life seemed to go out of her with the fear. If it had been a ship in a storm off the Headland, it couldn't have pitched worse; and then, all of a sudden, it was dropped with such a bang as nearly drove the heart into her mouth.

“But that, she said, was nothing to the screaming and laughing, and hustling and rushing that filled the house. If a hundred people had been running hard along the passages and tumbling downstairs, they could not have made a greater noise.

“Molly never was able to tell how she got clear of the place; but a man coming late home from Ballycloyne Fair found the creature crouched under the old thorn there, with very little on her—saving your honour's presence. She had a bad fever, and talked about strange things, and never was the same woman after.”

“But what was the beginning of all this? When did the house first get the name of being haunted?”

“After the old Squire went away: that was what I purposed telling you. He did not come here to live regularly till he had got well on in

years. He was near seventy at the time I am talking about ; but he held himself as upright as ever, and rode as hard as the youngest ; and could have drunk a whole roomful under the table, and walked up to bed as unconcerned as you please at the end of the night.

“ He was a terrible man. You couldn’t lay your tongue to a wickedness he had not been in the fore-front of—drinking, duelling, gambling—all manner of sins had been meat and drink to him since he was a boy almost. But at last he did something in London so bad, so beyond the beyonds, that he thought he had best come home and live among people who did not know so much about his goings on as the English. It was said he wanted to try and stay in this world for ever ; and that he had got some secret drops that kept him well and hearty. There was something wonderful queer about him, anyhow.

“ He could hold foot with the youngest ; and he was strong, and had a fine fresh colour in his face ; and his eyes were like a hawk’s ; and there was not a break in his voice—and him near upon threescore and ten !

“ At long and at last it came to be the March before he was seventy—the worst March ever

known in all these parts—such blowing, sleet-ing, snowing, had not been experienced in the memory of man; when one blusterous night some foreign vessel went to bits on the Purple Head-land. They say it was an awful sound to hear the death-cry that went up high above the noise of the wind; and it was as bad a sight to see the shore there strewed with corpses of all sorts and sizes, from the little cabin-boy to the griz-zled seaman.

“They never knew who they were or where they came from, but some of the men had crosses, and beads, and such like, so the priest said they belonged to him, and they were all buried decently in the chapel graveyard.

“There was not much wreckage of value drifted on shore. Most of what is lost about the Head stays there; but one thing did come into the bay—a queer thing—a puncheon of brandy.

“The Squire claimed it; it was his right to have all that came on his land, and he owned this sea-shore from the Head to the breakers—every foot—so, in course, he had the brandy; and there was sore ill-will because he gave his men nothing—not even a glass of whiskey.

“Well, to make a long story short, that was

the most wonderful liquor anybody ever tasted. The gentry came from far and near to take share, and it was cards and dice, and drinking and story-telling night after night—week in, week out. Even on Sundays, God forgive them! the officers would drive over from Ballyclone, and sit emptying tumbler after tumbler till Monday morning came, for it made beautiful punch.

“But all at once people quit coming—a word went round that the liquor was not all it ought to be. Nobody could say what ailed it, but it got about that in some way men found it did not suit them.

“For one thing, they were losing money very fast.

“They could not make head against the Squire’s luck, and a hint was dropped the puncheon ought to have been towed out to sea, and sunk in fifty fathoms of water.

“It was getting to the end of April, and fine, warm weather for the time of year, when first one, and then another, and then another still, began to take notice of a stranger who walked the shore alone at night. He was a dark man, the same colour as the drowned crew lying in the chapel grave-yard, and had rings in his ears, and

wore a strange kind of hat, and cut wonderful antics as he walked, and had an ambling sort of gait, curious to look at. Many tried to talk to him, but he only shook his head ; so, as nobody could make out where he came from or what he wanted, they made sure he was the spirit of some poor wretch who was tossing about the Head, longing for a snug corner in holy ground.

“The priest went and tried to get some sense out of him.

“‘Is it Christian burial you’re wanting?’ asked his reverence ; but the creature only shook his head.

“‘Is it word sent to the wives and daughters you’ve left orphans and widows, you’d like?’ but no ; it wasn’t that.

“‘Is it for sin committed you’re doomed to walk this way? Would masses comfort ye? There’s a heathen,’ said his reverence ; ‘did you ever hear tell of a Christian that shook his head when masses were mentioned?’

“‘Perhaps he doesn’t understand English, Father,’ says one of the officers who was there ; ‘try him with Latin.’

“No sooner said than done. The priest started off with such a string of aves and paters that the stranger fairly took to his heels and ran.

“‘‘He is an evil spirit,’ explained the priest, when he had stopped, tired out, ‘and I have exorcised him.’

“But next night my gentleman was back again, as unconcerned as ever.

“‘‘And he’ll just have to stay,’ said his reverence, ‘for I’ve got lumbago in the small of my back, and pains in all my joints—never to speak of a hoarseness with standing there shouting; and I don’t believe he understood a sentence I said.’

“Well, this went on for awhile, and people got that frightened of the man, or appearance of a man, they would not go near the sands; till in the end Squire Ennismore, who had always scoffed at the talk, took it into his head he would go down one night, and see into the rights of the matter himself. He, maybe, was feeling lonesome, because, as I told your honour before, people had left off coming to the house, and there was nobody for him to drink with.

“Out he goes, then, as bold as brass; and there were a few followed him. The man came forward at sight of the Squire and took off his hat with a foreign flourish. Not to be behind in civility, the Squire lifted his.

“‘I have come, sir,’ he said, speaking very loud, to try to make him understand, ‘to know if you are looking for anything, and whether I can assist you to find it.’

“The man looked at the Squire as if he had taken the greatest liking to him, and took off his hat again.

“‘Is it the vessel that was wrecked you are distressed about?’

“There came no answer, only a forbye mournful shake of the head.

“‘Well, *I* haven’t your ship, you know; it went all to bits months ago; and as for the sailors, they are snug and sound enough in consecrated ground.’

“The man stood and looked at the Squire with a queer sort of smile on his face.

“‘What *do* you want?’ asked Mr. Ennismore, in a bit of a passion. ‘If anything belonging to you went down with the vessel it’s about the Head you ought to be looking for it, not here—unless, indeed, it’s after the brandy you’re fretting.’

“Now, the Squire had tried him in English and French, and was now speaking a language you’d have thought nobody could understand; but, faith, it seemed natural as kissing to the stranger.

“‘Oh! that’s where you are from, is it?’ said the Squire. ‘Why couldn’t you have told me so at once? I can’t give you the brandy, because it’s mostly drunk; but come along, and you shall have as stiff a glass of punch as ever crossed your lips.’ And without more to-do off they went, as sociable as you please, jabbering together in some outlandish tongue that made moderate folks’ jaws ache to hear.

“That was the first night they conversed together, but it wasn’t the last. The stranger must have been the height of good company, for the Squire never tired of him. Every evening, regularly, he came up to the house, always dressed the same, always smiling and polite, and then the Squire called for brandy and hot water, and they drank and played cards till cock-crow, talking and laughing into the small hours.

“This went on for weeks and weeks, nobody knowing where the man came from, or where he went; only two things the old housekeeper did know—that the puncheon was nearly empty, and that the Squire’s flesh was wasting off him; and she felt so uneasy she went to the priest, but he could give her no manner of comfort.

“She got so concerned at last that she felt

bound to listen at the dining-room door; but they always talked in that foreign gibberish, and whether it was blessing or cursing they were at she couldn't tell.

"Well, the upshot of it came one night in July—on the eve of the Squire's birthday—there wasn't a drop of spirit left in the puncheon—no, not as much as would drown a fly. They had drunk the whole lot clean up—and the old woman stood trembling, expecting every minute to hear the bell ring for more brandy, for where was she to get more if they wanted any?

"All at once the Squire and the stranger came out into the hall. It was a full moon, and light as day.

"'I'll go home with you to-night by way of a change,' says the Squire.

"'Will you so?' asked the other.

"'That I will,' answered the Squire.

"'It is your own choice, you know.'

"'Yes; it is my own choice: let us go.'

"So they went. And the housekeeper ran up to the window on the great staircase and watched the way they took. Her niece lived there as housemaid, and she came and watched too; and, after a while, the butler as well. They all turned their

faces this way, and looked after their master walking beside the strange man along these very sands. Well, they saw them walk out and out to the very ebb-line—but they didn't stop there—they went on, and on, and on, and on, till the water took them to their knees, and then to their waists, and then to their arm-pits, and then to their heads; but long before that the women and the butler were running out on the shore as fast as they could, shouting for help."

"Well?" said the Englishman.

"Living or dead, Squire Ennismore never came back again. Next morning, when the tide ebbed again, one walking over the sand saw the print of a cloven foot—that he tracked to the water's edge. Then everybody knew where the Squire had gone, and with whom."

"And no more search was made?"

"Where would have been the use searching?"

"Not much, I suppose. It's a strange story, anyhow."

"But true, your honour—every word of it."

"Oh! I have no doubt of that," was the satisfactory reply.

A STORM IN A TEA-CUP:

BEING THE TRUE STORY OF MR. BROWN'S RETRIEVER.

With the original correspondence between Messrs. BROWN and JONES concerning that Animal, now published for the first time, by the kind permission of NATHANIEL BROWN, Esq.

CHAPTER I.

ABOUT twelve miles from London there is an extremely pretty and rural hamlet called Dingleton Dale. In the language of local auctioneers, estate agents, and owners of houses, it is a “favoured neighbourhood.” Perhaps so. It is at all events beautifully inaccessible, except to the River Thames, which now and then comes up over the lawns of the villas to see how the inhabitants are getting on during a wet winter; when, once again to adopt the phraseology of Dingleton, the “water comes down from Oxford”

acres and acres and acres of land which ought to be dry are submerged; all the low-lying meadows are converted into a lake; trees and hedges seem growing in the middle of a broad and rapid stream, and notices to trespassers appear in places where people could not trespass, even in a boat. Nevertheless, Dingleton is a much esteemed and desired locality. It is considered a good address; it is situated near Richmond and Bushey and the Home Parks, and "therefore," so say its inhabitants, "must always remain select."

Ah! what a flattering and deceiving tale Hope has told the credulous Dingletonians. There is nothing under Heaven—not even the River Thames—will protect any neighbourhood from the incursions of those ravaging barbarians, land societies, and the speculative builder. Already they are marching on Dingleton. Already an "estate" near at hand has been purchased, the old Hall cleared off the face of the earth, the ground divided into lots, over which, and at a point that water in wet seasons particularly affects, a number of shoddy houses, one brick thick, have been erected. The old Hall has not been six months dead, nor are the new houses over it yet three months old. Nevertheless, the latter

already boast inmates, who must be graduating for the nearest cemetery; and as the foundations of the “long leasehold property” are settling faster even than the houses are letting, it has been found necessary to shore them every one up!

So that it will be seen there is not much chance for Dingleton now that the British tradesman has got in the thin edge of his wedge. After a time all the secluded spots, all the pretty dwellings, will be deserted, and the place become one hideous waste of terraces, streets, and villas; an iron church will take the place of yon picturesque cottage, and a beershop be licensed to “consume on the premises” where my lord’s lodge, with roses clustering all about it, stands now.

But, for the present, Dingleton is rural and pretty. As yet no railway engine, belching forth steam and smoke and scattering dust and ashes, comes tearing across the village green with yells of fury, and snorts as of some creature in physical distress. The nearest station is more than a mile distant. The road to it is extremely bad, and clerks with chilblains and eighteen shillings a week, trudging through the snow and mud, have therefore the pleasure of seeing their “governors”

traps" conveying those favoured individuals to and from Dingleton, where the happy clerks have been so lucky as to secure houses quite close to the river, in which on summer evenings they go down to fish and never catch anything, or try to drown themselves by adventuring in a cockle-shell boat in the wake of a steam launch, in which endeavour they frequently prove successful.

In Dingleton (the Dale is usually dispensed with, except on rating-papers and County Court summonses) there resided, in fact there still reside, two gentlemen, distinguished by the not uncommon names of Jones and Brown. The latter lived at Eglantine Lodge, the former at Honeysuckle Cottage.

Mr. Brown had been baptized Nathaniel, and Mr. Jones, if ever he was baptized at all, of which Mr. Brown entertains doubts, Theophilus.

Mr. Brown had something to do with a great firm of corn factors in Mark Lane, while Mr. Jones was connected with the Surrey, Hampshire and Dorsetshire Railway, which, in point of speed, punctuality, consideration for the general public, and regard to the comfort and convenience of its own peculiar passengers, more particularly its second-class season-ticket holders, claimed to vie

with that paragon of companies, the London and South-Western itself.

Mr. Brown was of the middle height, a “just height,” trim, and brisk, and holding himself very upright. Mr. Jones, on the contrary, was tall and loosely made, and walked rather lazily, with his head bent a little forward, as if it were too heavy for his neck. Further, he wore spectacles, “and that,” observes Mr. Brown, speaking generally, but alluding really to Mr. Jones, “always gives a man a bad look.”

Mr. Brown’s father had lived before him, and had left that gentleman so far independent of the world that he had only to take care of a very good position, and not to make one. Mr. Jones’s father had also lived before him, but there the resemblance ceased. Mr. Jones, senior, was living still, in his son’s house, and dependent on him. Having spent about fifty years in trying to make a position and failed, he was now, at seventy, devoting himself to the pleasing task of criticising the failures of other people, Theophilus’ included.

Mr. Brown’s family was small, Mr. Jones’ large. Mr. Jones occasionally found trouble in making the two ends meet, Mr. Brown never.

Now it happened that the two gentlemen, so

widely different in most respects, and unacquainted one with the other except by sight, oddly enough became possessed at precisely the same time each of a retriever, the most useless dog, except, perhaps, a greyhound, that, as a rule, a man can admit into his affections. Already Mr. Brown owned two dogs —one a mongrel, a regular dog of the people, that was of no race and no breed; a smooth-coated creature, in colour dirty white, having one ear tipped with brown, and owning a dark mark round its left eye, which gave it, in addition to a general effect of having passed a life of sin and vagabondism in the gutter, the look of having just come out of a street fight. The other was a long-backed, short-legged creature of the turnspit species, full of cunning, though destitute of genius, who, when Mr. Brown wished to seduce out with him as a companion on Sunday afternoons and summer evenings, had a trick of sitting down once it got about a dozen yards from Eglantine Lodge, and, like Juliet, “fetching its breath like a new ta’en sparrow,” to such an extent Mr. Brown feared to take the animal any distance lest he should have to carry it back. If, after a too hasty exclamation, he despatched Pedro—that was the animal’s name —home again, expediting its return with a stone,

he found it exceedingly annoying to immedately meet that odious Captain Nile and *his* dog, which seemed indeed a very counterpart of that gentleman, cocking one ear as the Captain cocked his hat, keeping his left eye half-closed in imitation of the Captain's eye-glass, bowing his legs as the Captain did his, and screwing down its mouth just in what Dingleton called the same nasty jeering way the Captain drew down his.

Captain Nile was not popular in Dingleton, except amongst the tradespeople. He held aloof from matrimony, and he kept a monkey—the first being a slight to the ladies, and the second a terror to them. As for the men—most of them in business—they had no patience with a fellow who did nothing but eat and drink, and sleep, and walk about with that beast of a dog; the fairer portion of Dingleton inclined to the belief that the Captain had made his money in the slave trade, and said the monkey and the dog were “familiars.”

There was something about Sinbad—so Captain Nile's companion was called—extremely suggestive of evil: at any rate Mr. Brown always thought so when he met the pair. He thought so much about the Captain, in fact, that he determined to start an opposition dog, which would follow him—

a beautiful creature, one as handsome as Sinbad was ugly—one as active as Pedro was lazy—one as aristocratic in appearance as Bob was common. He could *not* take Bob out to walk—he felt he might as well take a street Arab—he wanted an animal which should at once be a credit to him and to his establishment, so he asked a friend—this is how, in all unconscious emulation of a well-known publisher, who used the same phrase when talking about a Christmas number, he afterwards told what he had done: “I spoke to a practical man who understood about such things”—where a dog of the description indicated could be procured.

The practical friend undertook to make inquiries, and at the end of a week told Mr. Brown he had heard of a man down in Essex who, under a combination of those peculiar circumstances which always occur when one individual wants to cheat another, was willing to part with a most beautiful retriever, that if broken would be worth not less than twenty pounds, for three guineas.

This perfect specimen of canine beauty would be sent up for inspection; if Mr. Brown approved he could pay the money, if not approved he might return the dog with the messenger—nothing, in

the opinion of the practical friend, could be fairer—and in this opinion Mr. Brown coincided.

The day came and the dog—a lean, wavy-haired creature, with pathetically drooping ears, a pointed muzzle, a sad expression of countenance, caused, no doubt, by the knowledge that it was an arrant impostor, and a tail it seemed almost to lack courage to carry after it. Dragged reluctantly into the office, it looked sorrowfully around, and at once took refuge under Mr. Brown's chair.

“Look at that!” exclaimed the honest countryman who had—dressed in fustian, and smelling of manure—escorted the animal to London. “Look at that—he takes to you a'ready, sir. Did you ever witness anything more remarkable?” he added, addressing an elderly clerk, whose first impulse and one on which he acted, had been to put a convenient distance between himself and the unwonted visitor.

“You needn't be afraid of him,” went on the man; “he won't hurt you, bless you. He is as quiet as a lamb, he is—wouldn't touch nothing—here—lad,” and dragging the creature out from its hiding-place, he put his hand in its mouth, which he opened for the purpose.

“What name does he answer to?” asked Mr.

Brown, who considered this way of putting the question effective.

“Well, sir, he’ll a’most answer to any name,” replied the man. “Every child about the place had a different way of calling him. He used to be Banjo and Romp, but lately the mistress she christened him ‘Sweep,’ on account of the grand way he let his tail drag the ground. Here, Sweep, Sweep,” and a piece of biscuit being produced Sweep ate it, glancing all the time out of the corners of his eyes at Mr. Brown.

“He follows well, I suppose?” said that gentleman, interrogatively.

“He’d follow you to the world’s end,” answered the man.

“And is he fond of children?”

“Fond!—that’s not the word for it. He was reared with them, you see, and it was first one and then the other, giving him a spoonful of bread and milk, or a bit of meat, or a piece of bread, or part of an apple. I left six of them at the bend of the road crying their eyes out after him.”

“He does not look very fat,” ventured Mr. Brown, surveying Sweep critically.

“It’s with being over-fed, sir,” said the man, with an unabashed countenance. “What that dog

wants is lighter meals, for a while, and nothing between meals. The young ones did not give him time to digest his food and put it on his bones. They just kept him eating all day long. You try what I tell you, three meals per diem regular, and half-an-hour's sleep after each meal; and by the end of a month you will be surprised at the difference."

"I don't like the name," said Mr. Brown, meekly.

"Well, a-many don't take to it at first. When they see him walking about, though, stately, with his tail brushing the gravel, they see the beauty of it—but of course, sir, there ain't much in altering a name. Don is one I am partial to myself."

"Don is not so bad," agreed Mr. Brown.

There was a little more conversation, and the bargain was struck; for three pounds and half-a-crown for himself, and a promise of beer at the other end, the man agreed to deliver Don at Dingleton, Mr. Brown intimating he would try to get down by an early train so as to be in waiting to receive his new purchase.

It might be an hour, or it might be an hour and a half before he could start, the man intimated, as he had something to see to for the master, but

Mr. Brown might rest assured he would appear at Dingleton in the course of the afternoon, and as Mr. Brown had not paid him there was not the slightest reason to doubt but that he would keep his word.

Thus it was Mr. Brown became the happy possessor of a "beautiful retriever." On the strength of the purchase, his practical friend dined at Eglantine Lodge and looked the new purchase over.

So did Mr. Brown—they examined his mouth, and his teeth, and his ears, and his tail and his feet, and the friend found out that the only thing amiss about the creature was a claw.

Said he, "The dew claw's malformed?"

"So it is," cried Mr. Brown, who till that moment had never heard of a dew claw, and had not the faintest notion what it meant.

But he was not going to give his friend a triumph over him, and so pretended to know all about it. That night he looked in the dictionary, and as he could find no mention of a dew-claw there, bought a book treating of dogs, from which he learned all about it, and so irrigated the City of London with the stream of his knowledge that during the course of the next week at least a hundred people were made as wise as himself. Some of them d——d Mr. Brown

and his dew-claw, when subsequently comparing notes, which was a matter to be regretted, though he remained in ignorance of the circumstance.

This was how, as has been said, Mr. Brown became possessed of his treasure. The way in which a similar blessing arrived at Honeysuckle Cottage was different.

Mr. Jones, in common with all the other inhabitants in Dingleton, had a garden. It would have been a good garden if kept in proper order, but words cannot describe what Mr. Brown thought it looked like when, peeping over the hedge that divided it from a lane he often passed along, he beheld a wilderness of weeds; gooseberry-bushes dying in the embrace of convolvulus; nettles, tall and strong and hearty, thriving far better than cabbages; a variety of wild flowers that might have delighted a botanist; couch-grass running over the strawberry-beds, and docks and cat's-tail taking as much out of the soil as a crop of wheat might have done.

In this neglected inclosure there grew a few pear, plum and apple trees, that, greatly to their credit, produced a considerable amount of fruit, which, however, never came to perfection, for the simple reason that the children ate it all while it was

green; while, within a space parted off and netted over, the family kept about a dozen tattered and miserable old hens, who spent their lives in looking for worms and insects, the stock of which they had exhausted long previously.

These unfortunate birds could not have laid an egg among them if they had tried, which they never did, however; but there was a fiction in the Jones's household that they were going to do so about the day after to-morrow, and, accordingly, when there came the periodical scare about burglars, which always alarms those most who possess nothing a thief in his senses would want to steal, Mr. Jones, senior, declared impressively that if Phil, as he called the loosely-made gentleman who wore spectacles, persisted in not getting a dog, he for one should decline to answer for the consequences—not a fowl would be left, or an apple, or a pear.

Poor Mr. Jones did not want to get a dog. On the whole, he would have preferred the burglars, who at least might not be expected to turn up periodically about meal times. He felt he had mouths enough to fill already. He knew if the fruit was stolen the doctor's bills would be lighter. And as each egg he had for breakfast was staler

than its predecessor, he might be excused for imagining that what his hens never had done they never would do.

As to the inside of Honeysuckle Cottage, he remarked that if a thief could find any valuables in it, it was what he had never been able to do. To which sarcastic observation Mr. Jones, senior, replied resignedly that the absence of articles worth carrying off would only make matters worse: out of pure disappointment, the inmates would all be murdered in their beds.

So at last the head of the household, baited and badgered into giving a reluctant consent, said his father might look out a dog. "Only mind," he added, "I won't have one in the house."

Like Mr. Brown, the elder Jones desired something to "look at," and, foiled in his intention of enriching the neighbourhood with a fine poodle or an Italian greyhound, he bethought him that, living so close to the Thames, an animal which would "take to the water" might produce an equal sensation.

Acting upon this idea, he made many inquiries, and mentioned to a booking clerk on the S. H. and D. R. that his son "would not mind giving half-a-sovereign if he could meet with a good-looking dog

that wasn't afraid of a burglar and was able to swim."

The clerk, having a friend down in Devonshire, a gamekeeper, promised to mention the matter to him, and did write a letter, setting forth as a good joke the fact that one of their gentlemen "thought he could get a handsome watch and water dog for ten bob!"

To his astonishment, back wrote the keeper:

"I have got the very thing that will suit your governor. He's a thoroughbred retriever, black as a coal, with a fine set of teeth. Hates the sight of a tramp, and would swim across the Straits. He has never been trained, is the reason the gent could have him, for he is too old to take in hand to teach now. He can be had, collar, chain and all, for fifteen shillings. Let me know at once, as there is another party sweet on him."

"We don't want him to retrieve, Phil, you know," observed Mr. Jones, senior.

"Certainly not," agreed Mr. Theophilus, who had no more idea what was meant by retrieving than Mr. Brown once possessed of the nature of a dew-claw.

"Then we had better send the man the fifteen shillings, because we shall want a chain and collar, anyhow."

With a groan, the gentleman who was privileged to provide the wherewithal to keep the wolf out of Honeysuckle Cottage produced the required sum.

“ You may as well leave me a sovereign while you are about it,” said Mr. Jones, senior, who often declared his son had “ no system.” “ There will be some expense, I suppose, in getting him up.”

Mr. Theophilus thought there would probably be some expense after he was got up, but knowing by sad experience what small heed would be paid to any remonstrance of his, he unwillingly produced twenty shillings, and tried to forget the tribulation he foresaw in store.

Accordingly, on the same day, and within a space of a few hours, two new dogs were added to the attractions of Dingleton.

Don was, with many sly kicks and profane adjurations on the part of the Essex countryman, dragged by a piece of rope knotted round his neck to Eglantine Lodge, while Jack, fresh as if he had that instant started from Devonshire, so ramped and pulled and tore at his chain, that the porter who took him to Honeysuckle Cottage affirmed “ the sweat was pouring off him ” (the speaker) “ like water, and his arms were pulled a'most out of their sockets.”

That night Captain Nile, Sinbad and the monkey pricked up their ears.

The Captain resided equi-distant between Mr. Jones' cottage and Mr. Brown's villa. From the garden of the latter there issued a succession of the most mournful howls, alternated with an occasional whimper; while, out of the yard of the former there came a bow-wow-wow which never ceased for a moment, which made the throat ache even to hear, which seemed as if it must proceed from some demon in the earthly guise of a black retriever.

The Captain opened his hall door, and, standing out under the porch, listened; Sinbad was at his feet, the monkey on his shoulder.

To his left there was a lamentation as of lost souls; to his right, a noise as if Bedlam had broken loose, and was holding carnival in Mr. Jones' establishment.

“What the ——” said the captain, in amazed and irreverent soliloquy, as he turned to re-enter his house.

CHAPTER II.

CAPTAIN NILE and Sinbad did themselves the honour of calling both at Eglantine Lodge and

Honeysuckle Cottage, to remonstrate concerning their night being made hideous; but ours is, fortunately for some people, a free country, where every man has a right to annoy his neighbour as much as he likes—and, “not being among his slaves,” as Mr. Jones, senior, happily expressed himself, the Captain was obliged to put up with the canine concert.

For the first time, however, speaking relations were established among the males of the three households, and this fact enabled Captain Nile to infuse a drop of bitter into the sweetness of the Jones-Brown cups.

When he met Nathaniel Brown, Esq., walking abroad on Saturday—that gentleman did not go to town, but stayed at home especially to cultivate the acquaintance of his new purchase—Sinbad’s master stopped, and asked him what he fed his dog on that “*kept him so nice and thin*,” while the same morning he button-holed old Jones at the railway-station, to inquire what breed he called that “new singer they had started at the Cottage.”

“He’s a very fine retriever, and takes to the water like a duck,” said Mr. Jones, senior, proudly.

“Oh! he’s a retriever, is he; and Mr. Brown’s

pup, that never ceases practising an Irish ‘keen,’ is a retriever too. How very odd ! I wonder if Sinbad also is a retriever in disguise ?”

It was heart-breaking ! Here was one individual possessed of a thoroughbred animal, and another the owner of a creature that might be regarded perfect, always saving and excepting that malformed dew-claw, and yet the Captain sneered at both.

Mr. Brown felt satisfied “Jones’ brute” was the cause of the animus, and Mr. Jones the elder knew the Captain would not have said a word in disparagement of “Jack” if he had not been driven crazy with that wail of despair from Eglantine Lodge.

Dingleton society was, however, destined to be deprived of the bigger, stronger, and louder fiend Jack—at least for a time. On the very Sunday after his arrival at the cottage Lionel Jones, grandson of the Jones given to criticism, and nephew of Mr. Theophilus, came down from London—where during the week he did as little work as he could in a stock-broker’s office—to go to church, dine, and take tea with his relations.

Greatly charmed by Jack’s antics—by the way, he tried to strangle himself with his chain, stood

on his hind legs frantically pawing the air, and running in mad semicircles to and fro—the youth proposed after dinner that they should all proceed to the Thames, accompanied by the thoroughbred, who, as a retriever, certainly did possess one curious quality, namely, that when he picked up anything he utterly refused to give it up.

Mrs. Jones, her father-in-law, the children—the whole family, in brief, except the rightful Mr. Jones, who happened to be out of town—repaired to the river, where Jack, after nearly upsetting a small boat, being almost overwhelmed in the wash of a steam-launch, knocking down two little boys, and otherwise playfully disporting himself, was at length told they would all have to go home, as the afternoon felt chilly, and Mrs. Jones did not like the little ones to remain longer exposed to the damp valley air.

It was then Mr. Lionel, who had all along been panting to get the dog to himself, said that as he did not mind the river air—as he, in fact, had an especial immunity from cold, conferred upon him by Providence—he would go with Jack for a straight-out walk, which was what the poor brute wanted.

No objection being made to this reasonable

proposal, as perhaps every one considered Jack did want something, Lionel marched off in triumph, with only one note of warning sounding in his ears :

“Whatever you do, *don’t take him near Richmond Park!*”

“All right,” answered Lionel, who, till that moment, had never conceived a desire to show Jack the beauties of that sylvan retreat.

Half an hour later he found himself—of course quite accidentally—at the Norbiton gate, leading Jack through the entrance with a piece of cord which he had attached to the animal’s collar.

The keeper looked hard at him and Jack as they passed by, but the dog, for reasons sufficient to his own mind, assumed so staid a walk and sanctified a look he might have deceived a Metropolitan magistrate. No ramping or tearing now—he walked on quietly and majestically, looking, however, askance at Lionel, and showing as much of his tongue as was compatible with keeping it attached to the roots.

They went on and did not meet a creature. Jack began to pull a little, and then a little more, and then he pulled a great deal. They were just commencing to go down the incline which preludes

the turn towards Ham gate, when a rabbit scurried across the road, and at the same moment some crows rose, and, cawing, began to fly homewards.

That proved too much for Jack—with mad bark and wild leap he was off. His sudden spring had snapped the cord like a bit of pack-thread—the strangled “Hoo—o—eoh” with which he celebrated his release would not have disgraced a red Indian. He was gone, and Heaven only knew where to. Lionel stood with the end of broken string in his hand, stupidly looking at the far away bracken, among which Jack appeared already but as a mere speck.

“I’d throw that bit of twine away, if I were you,” said a voice close behind, which made him jump almost as high as Jack had done; “it will only get you into trouble.”

“Oh! Captain Nile, what shall I do?” asked the lad, thankful to see it was not a keeper, but only Captain Nile, with his hat cocked on one side more than usual, a broader grin than ever on his face, his legs more sea-going than their wont, and by his side Sinbad, apparently enjoying the fun quite as much as his master.

“I don’t see that you can do anything,” sensibly replied the Captain.

“How in the world shall I be able to catch the brute?”

“I shouldn’t try.”

“And my grandfather told me specially not to bring him here.”

“Unless he wanted you to bring him that wasn’t prudent.”

“He’s sure to go after the deer. I daresay he is hunting them now.”

“Well, let him hunt the deer; it will amuse him, and not hurt them much, I’ll be bound. What you have to do is to think of yourself. I don’t know what the punishment may be for killing game in the Royal Parks; but for killing a swan on the river it is precious heavy. Your best and safest plan will be to walk on as if you had never seen Jack. Go out by the Petersham gate, and make the best of your way home.”

“My grandfather will be furious.”

The Captain laughed sardonically.

“The dog is one that could be conveniently lost anywhere—why in Richmond Park? East Molesey, now, wouldn’t be a bad sort of neighbourhood.”

“But that would not be true,” said the young fellow, answering the spirit of this suggestion.

“It would be as true as that the animal has a

bit of breed in him. Look ye! I'm only speaking for your good. If the dog does any damage here, and he is known to belong to you, it may cost your uncle a pot of money. Take my advice: go home, and persuade yourself by the way you lost him where I tell you; as for me, mum's the word!" And the Captain and Sinbad struck across the path over the grass leading to Ham, while Lionel dolorously bent his steps in the direction of Petersham.

About what occurred when he reached Honeysuckle Cottage he was for ever after silent; but on the following afternoon, the Captain, seeing hand-bills announcing the loss of a thoroughbred retriever at East Molesey, and offering a reward of two pounds for restoration to Honeysuckle Cottage, Dingleton Dale, knew old Mr. Jones was not going to find such an amount of money, and felt convinced Lionel would think a good many times before taking a dog of which he knew nothing out to walk in Richmond Park or anywhere else again.

Even the offer of two pounds' reward—forty shillings more than he was worth, declared the Captain—failed to bring back Jack. Many animals were brought to the Cottage, and rejected—Newfoundlanders, setters, spaniels, retrievers, collies, but no

Jack: his kennel remained empty; and as months passed away, his very existence was forgotten, even by Mr. Jones senior.

Meanwhile, Don was growing in favour day by day, or rather week by week, with his master. He was growing also in height, and promised eventually to be a big bony mongrel. Except when the moon was very bright he soon ceased lamenting. Mr Brown discovered that a nice hot supper induced sleep, and this pleasing medicine was taken by Don with admirable regularity. As a rule, save when Mr. Brown had leisure to trot him out, he was kept on the chain. He rested a good deal, he ate a good deal, but he did not get fat.

“He is growing too fast,” remarked a friend, “to get flesh on his bones; wait a little, and you will see how he will fill out.”

New Year’s day came round, and according to custom Mr. Brown and his wife and children repaired to make merry (in London) at the house of Mr. Brown’s mother.

That morning, after breakfast, he had let off Don just for a little run in the road; and it was not till the servant in Albion Road, Stoke Newington, where *la veuve* Brown resided, announced dinner, that he remembered he had never fastened Don up again.

His first impulse was to return immediately to Dingleton ; but his mother absolutely refused to hear of such a proceeding.

“ The dog would be tied up by some one,” she said, “ or, even if not, he must know his home by this time.”

Mr. Brown had his misgivings ; but managed to eat some roast beef and mince-pies with a tolerable appetite.

When he returned home, his first question was concerning Don. No one had thought anything about him, till the gardener went to take him his dinner, when he could not be found. “ They had searched for the dear creature,” said the cook, “ high and low ; they had hardly taken time for their own meals, so anxious were they to get Don back to his.”

“ He’s sure to come in the morning, sir, the gardener says,” observed the housemaid ; “ he’s too fond of you, sir, to stop away.”

It was meant for comfort ; but Mr. Brown felt too broken-hearted to take much consolation out of the memory of Don’s affections. The morning came, but no Don with it. Many mornings dawned, but brought no good tidings to the afflicted household.

As Mr. Jones had done, Mr. Brown offered a

reward—as Mr. Jones also had done, repair to the police, Mr. Brown also repaired. A full description of Don was printed, flattering perhaps, but still, as his owner believed, quite true; and yet no one recognised Don from it or brought him back to his bereaved master.

The weeks rolled by, the months passed; Don, though absent, was still lamented. Richmond Park was starred with primroses; the elm trees about Dingleton Dale were all clad in a fairy-like “mist of green;” the waters had subsided, and pleasure boats began to dart up and down the Thames; the swans sailed majestically round and about the aits; and Mr. Brown was thinking how he and Don would have enjoyed the fine spring weather in friendly companionship, when one day Captain Nile hailed him from afar.

“Brown!” he hallooed, “Brown, I’ve a word for you; in your ear, man. Should you like to know where that dog you lost is? For I can tell you. He’s at Honeysuckle Cottage.”

“You are joking!” gasped Mr. Brown.

“Am I?” asked the Captain, with a knowing wink; “am I?”

* * * * *

Next morning Mr. Brown was hurrying to the

station, when he beheld a dog wandering about the incline he conceived to be the long missing Don, and calling a young porter bade him put a rope round his neck and take him to Eglantine Lodge.

“I’ll see you as I come home,” he added significantly, and hurrying on to the platform, just caught his train. He felt very happy as he bustled from place to place in the City, and repaired home earlier than usual to indulge in the delight of once again patting the melancholy Don ; but what was his dismay to find that faithful animal had never put in an appearance !

In hot wrath he walked back again to the station, and demanded the address of the porter, who, he had been told on his arrival there, was “off duty.” After some searching through a neighbourhood he had no idea existed within two miles of Dingleton, he found that young man engaged in gardening, and asked him “Why the —— he had not done what he was told ?”

He could not, he said, for Mr. Jones (senior) had stopped him on the road, and asking what he was doing with his dog, bade him unloose the animal, and took it home again with him.

Here was a pretty affair. Here was confirmation of what Captain Nile had hinted. It was not enough

for Mr. Jones to lose his own dog, he must also steal his—Mr. Brown's. Poor Mr. Brown! When he thought of what he had suffered during those weary weeks and months, when Don was all the time within a stone's throw of him, his spirit waxed hot, and, retracing his weary steps to Eglantine Lodge, he wrote and despatched a sarcastically polite note to Mr. Jones, begging the immediate return of “my dog.”

In reply, Mr. Jones called the next day, accompanied by the animal in question, seeing at first only some members of the Brown family, but being fortunate enough to meet Mr. Brown as that gentleman was entering his gate.

Mr. Jones was not an individual anxious to seek a quarrel. Nevertheless, the result of the subsequent interview, during the course of which he was walked round the well-kept garden at Eglantine Lodge, and a good deal harassed in his mind by Mr. Brown's mental activity, which seemed to him frightful, was not satisfactory.

But for the thought of what his father might say, he would have given up the dog gladly and thankfully; but as the matter stood, or rather as he stood, he felt between Scylla and Charybdis. Lionel had paid two pounds for the brute Mr. Brown now

claimed ; further, Mr. Brown insinuated many unpleasant things concerning the creature's detention —for all of which reasons Mr. Jones finally called Jack, and marched away from Eglantine Lodge, declaring Mr. Brown should hear from him in the course of the evening.

He did not care for much letter-writing, and therefore, in compliance with his promise, only despatched a short note saying the dog was his, and that he must decline to deliver him over to Mr. Brown. This note procured the family at Honeysuckle Cottage the happiness of a visit from Mr. Brown, which was so unsatisfactory that there immediately ensued the following correspondence, which goes far to prove the truth of an observation made by a witty and observant editor, namely, that he finds “it is only really busy people who have time for anything.”

Mr. Brown's first trumpet-note was long and loud. Here it is :

“Eglantine Villa, 11th April, 1881.

“DEAR SIR,

“I am in receipt of your favour of Saturday, and in reply I have to say that I am absolutely certain you have my dog ; and how, on the facts,

you can entertain a doubt on the subject is to me a marvel. You must remember that I recognised my dog instantly, and called him by name, and the recognition was mutual, for he showed all the delight a dog could at seeing me, and followed me up the incline to the station, where I had a rope put round his collar, and ordered him to be taken to my house, when, as I understand, you stopped him on the way. You must remember the dog you had sent to you from Devonshire escaped from you within a week, whereas I had mine for over four months, and he used always to go out with me on Sundays, with two friends, Mr. Robinson and Mr. Briggs, who, with your permission, will call and see the dog. The date of loss at the police station, which date you stated you would consider very important, confirms my statement; besides, when my dog was brought to your house, months after you lost yours, your family only *thought* he might be your dog, but very thin and poor.

“Then, again, his recogniton of his old kennel in my garden (not the new one), the way he turned another dog out, the way he stood by his kennel when you left, and had to be called by you before he came, are to my mind as strong as the negative evidence of a dog can be.

“But the *culminating* point, the *malformation of the dew-claw*, the existence of which was remembered by my son at the last moment, as you were leaving; your astonishment at seeing it, the way my son named the dog directly he saw him and stated he could swear to him, should I think be absolutely conclusive to your mind.

“Then the statement in your letter ‘that he did not recognise my children, &c.,’ is scarcely ingenuous, and is probably a misunderstanding on the part of the writer of your letter.

“It was a matter of surprise to me the dog displayed so much intelligence, considering he is not full-grown yet, and had not seen his old quarters for over three months. I do not value the statement of the sender of the dog you lost, ‘that it was caught in a trap,’ as evidence as to my dog’s loose dew-claw, as that is a natural abnormal peculiarity.

“I trust to hear from you that you will *return me my dog.*

“I am, dear sir,

“Yours faithfully,

“NATHANIEL BROWN.

“To T. JONES, ESQ.,

“Honeysuckle Cottage.

On receipt of this agreeable epistle, Mr. Jones really could not tell what to do. Of his own knowledge Don might have been Jack or Jack Don, for he had never seen either, till introduced to the wretched creature in dispute, who was presented to him in the character of a returned and repentant prodigal who had grown dreadfully thin with feeding upon husks. He detested dogs, and would have been only too thankful to let Mr. Brown have his own, or Mr. Jones' own, without further dispute, but Mr. Brown had not been nice—not to mince words, Mr. Brown had been very nasty—so he sat down and wrote this reply :

“Honeysuckle Cottage, April 12th, 1881.

“DEAR SIR,

“I have yours of yesterday’s date, which I must confess somewhat surprises me. You charge me with disingenuousness; I will not retort, but would prefer pointing out that so far from your son ‘knowing the dog directly he saw him, &c.,’ he looked at him, and, when I asked him if he remembered seeing him before, he said ‘No;’ and subsequently said, ‘Can it be Don?’—a very natural remark, seeing you had lost a black dog so recently and I had asked an

unguarded question in drawing his attention to the black dog that was there. The recognition by the rest of your family was of a like nature, and of the weakest description. The dislocation of the *dew-claw* appeared to my mind an important fact in your favour, and I *at once frankly admitted it*, and I undertook to write to the gentleman who sent me the dog, as to whether mine had any such defect, and he replied to my second note, asking which claw was defective: ‘It was the inside claw, or what is called the *dew-claw*, which was dislocated—caused by the dog’s leg being caught in a rabbit trap.’ In the face of this fact you cannot ask me to attach any importance to the ‘culminating point’ you speak of.

“As to ‘recognising his old kennel,’ he was simply making a fuss with the dogs he found there. I remarked to you when we entered your garden that he had evidently no recollection of your place, and you did not deny it. As to ‘his having to be called by me, when I left your house, before he came,’ allow me to remind you of your expressing an opinion that I should have some difficulty in getting him away; and, as he was amusing himself with your two dogs, it would not have surprised me if I had had to call

him more than once—but you know that he no sooner had intimation that I was going than he bounded up your garden, and made a fuss with me in your hall, and so away.

“The dog’s evident ignorance of your house, his non-recognition of your children as already pointed out, and which you do not deny, but pass over with the remark ‘scarcely ingenuous,’ point irresistibly to the conclusion that he never had his home at your residence, while his emaciated condition when returned, months after we had lost him, his prompt ‘answer to his name—Jack,’ his dislocated *dew-claw* and the fully-explained cause thereof, all point to the conclusion that he is mine.

“As to your two friends seeing the dog, allow me to remind you that I have gone out of my way to test the ownership, by taking the dog to your home, and you know with what result; and you cannot reasonably ask me to do more.

“Allow me, in conclusion, to add that if I had any reasonable doubt as to the dog being the one I lost, I would gladly give you the benefit of it, but I have not.

“I am, dear sir,

“Yours faithfully,

“THEOPHILUS JONES.

“P.S.—As to your having ‘a rope put round the dog’s collar, &c.,’ you are mistaken in assuming that ‘I stopped him on the way.’ He was recognised as belonging to me, and sent home.”

To this lengthy epistle Mr. Brown, who was, when it arrived, absent from home, did not reply, and poor Mr. Jones, who was not merely afflicted with a captious father, a large family, short sight, and a chronic impecuniosity, but also with a fidgety sort of conscientiousness which never left him long at peace, beginning to doubt, after all, whether the dog was his, dispatched the creature to the Devonshire gamekeeper—who lived in the sweetest little cottage imaginable, with an old servant, his granddaughter, an imp of a dog as funny as Sinbad, and a collie as wise as Solomon. His disgust on seeing the animal forwarded to him would have amazed and shocked Mr. Brown, but the answer he returned with the “varmint” was insinuated, rather than repeated, by Mr. Jones in the following note :

“Honeysuckle Cottage, April 16th, 1881.

“DEAR SIR,

“In reference to the dog, although the circumstantial evidence appeared to me so conclusive as

to his being mine, I felt that it would be more satisfactory to all concerned if he were identified by the gamekeeper who bred him, especially as I myself had not seen the animal before he was lost. I therefore sent him to Devonshire this morning, and he is just back (7 p.m.). I learn that immediately the gamekeeper saw him, he said he was *not* the one sent to me, mine being a *thoroughbred retriever*, the one in question being a cross between a retriever and a Newfoundland, although both had a *dislocated dew-claw*, and perfectly black.

“I hasten therefore to apprise you of the fact, and to place the dog at your disposal.

“I must ask you to pay me for the animal’s keep during the twelve weeks I have had him—say two shillings per week, which I am told is the usual charge, although he has cost me more, for he was quite out of condition when he came to me, and has grown rapidly since.

“I am leaving home to-morrow afternoon, and shall not return until late on Monday, but shall be glad to see you on Tuesday evening, if you will favour me with a call in passing.

“Believe me, yours faithfully,

“T. JONES.

“N. Brown, Esq.”

Here was a triumph which might have satisfied any ordinary man; but Mr. Brown did not come under that category.

Flushed with success, and filled with rapture, he again plunged into correspondence with unabated ardour. This is what he wrote:

“21st April.

“ Dear Sir,

“ On my return from Brighton on Tuesday evening I found your note of the 16th instant waiting for me. I had intended coming in to see you yesterday, but perhaps it will be more satisfactory to us both if I reply in writing; and I have to say that I do not think you are justified in charging me for the keep of my own dog. We both gave notice at the police station that we had lost our dogs, and when mine was brought to you it was your duty to have told the police that a dog had been brought to you, which you believed to be yours, although you had never seen your own dog.

“ An inquiry would then have been made, and the rightful owner (myself) discovered, and I should not have been deprived of the pleasure of my dog for so many months, a pleasure I value far more highly than the 2s. a week which you propose to

charge would afford me. This charge had better be referred to arbitration; I noticed you write, ‘he has cost me more,’ and, should it be decided I am liable, I should prefer to pay you what you are really out of pocket, say 3d. a week extra, subject, of course, to any sum I may be awarded for loss of the society of my dog, a pleasure you and your family have enjoyed—and, as I hear from some, much appreciated—for three months past.

“If the value of this enjoyment should be assessed at 5s. per week, it will leave you my debtor, namely, twelve weeks at 2s. 9d., £1 12s.

“Trusting you will let me have my dog pending the decision of this money question,

“Yours respectfully,

“N. BROWN.

“T. Jones, Esq.”

As though he had been possessed of unlimited leisure, Mr. Jones instantly replied to Mr. Brown’s missive.

“Honeysuckle Cottage, April 21st, 1881.

“Dear Sir,—” (he said)

“Yours of yesterday’s date greatly surprises me.” (No wonder.) “After the trouble I have

taken to have right done, and the frank manner in which I have met you throughout the transaction, I was entitled to expect a very different response.

“ Your arrogant assertion as to my ‘duty,’ and the inference you draw from your bare assumption that I failed therein, fall pointlessly, when I tell you that I not only explained fully at the police office my position in reference to the lost dog, but, on finding what I believed to be my dog, I took him to the office and showed him to the officer in charge, and explained the circumstances of his recovery, and not one word was said as to the loss of another dog, nor had I the remotest idea that you had lost a dog until you claimed the one in question.

“ Your ingenuity in attempting to convert a debit into a credit is worthy of a better cause; if I were to descend to such arguments for a moment, I might remind you that you told me of your wife’s decided objections to a third dog—as you already had two—and gallantry might surely step in and put down the satisfaction of a lady at being spared the infliction of a third dog, as a complete set-off against the loss of your enjoyment of his society, which you appear to think is worth about $8\frac{1}{2}$ d. per

day—not a very ruinous concession to make to the prejudice of a lady ; but apart from that consideration, the *true* nature of your interest in the dog is betrayed by the fact that when asked by my family as to the character of your dog, you said, ‘you could not say much about him, as you had not taken much notice of him.’ To suddenly wake up to the loss you sustained in being ‘deprived of the pleasure of your dog’ appears in the face of the foregoing statement somewhat remarkable ; however, the dog has evidently not missed *your* society, for he has persistently repudiated your home from first to last, although he has had every opportunity of regaining it day by day for three months. I should have sent him to your residence on Saturday evening, immediately I learned he was not mine, but I knew you had two dogs already, and only two kennels, and I felt it might be a convenience if I held him to your order ; but to prevent your being deprived of the society of a third dog longer than absolutely necessary, I caused him to be sent across to you early this morning.

“ You will see that the animal has been well taken care of, and is greatly improved, and it only remains for me to express my conviction that I

am fully entitled, under the circumstances, to the usual charge for keep, viz., 2s. per week for twelve and a half weeks—25s.—and to request that you will pay me that sum at your early convenience.

“I am, dear sir,

“Yours truly,

“T. JONES.

“N. Brown, Esq., Dingleton Dale.”

“N. Brown, Esq.,

“The dog herewith. I write you to-day,

“T. J.

“Friday morning, 22, 4, '81.”

Matters were now growing serious, and did not seem likely to be mended by Mr. Brown, who, although he had got his dog with the imperfect dew-claw, answered Mr. Jones' expression of natural astonishment thus :

“25th April, 1881.

“DEAR SIR,

“I am in receipt of your letter, written on Wednesday last, but dated the 21st instant, in which you take great credit to yourself for the ‘frank manner in which you have met me throughout the transaction.’

“I regret that a careful review of the circum-

stances, and reperusal of the correspondence (the first sentence of which, you will pardon me for saying, contains a remarkable grammatical error on the part of your amanuensis) does not lead me think that you have any reason to be satisfied with your conduct. On the contrary, I think you have evinced a truly astonishing stubbornness to conviction in the face of conclusive evidence against your case.

“ I was under the impression that you told me you had not communicated with the police, and it is somewhat remarkable that on explaining to the officer that you had found a dog, which you believed to be yours, he did not at once tell you I also had lost one, and suggest that it might be mine, particularly as the dates, to which you attach so much importance, were strong evidence in my favour. How my notice of reward, posted at the ticket-office at our local station and generally about the neighbourhood, could have escaped your eye, is also a matter of much singularity.

“ Your memory is not at fault regarding my statement to you that a third dog would be objectionable at home ; in fact, I am about to get rid of one.

“ Touching the monetary question. I presume if you had not derived pleasure from keeping my

animal, you would not have kept him. However, as you still persist in your claim, let the matter be referred, as I have suggested. I propose that the whole of the correspondence be sent to the editor of the *Field*, the loser to pay all expenses, including award for 'loss of society.'

"I would remark that, if I was asked by your family as to the character of my dog, and replied, 'I could not say much about him,' as you state, I must have misunderstood the question, consequent probably on the family all speaking at once. As a matter of fact, the dog went out with me every Sunday.

"I regret to find the dog so thin, but I am glad to say he evinces no desire to return to your house.

"I do not value the statement of the gamekeeper who sent you the dog, viz., that he was a 'thoroughbred retriever.' That celebrated authority on dogs—Youatt—does not mention such a breed in his book, although he does say that any dog who will fetch and carry is a 'retriever,' as in like manner any dog that will turn a spit is a 'turnspit.' A thoroughbred retriever would be, I believe, unique, and certain to command a prize at a dog show.

"I am, dear sir,

"Yours truly."

This letter, with an access of politeness, was supplemented by the following:

“ 27th April.

“ DEAR SIR,

“ In the multiplicity of documents I had to sign last evening, I fancy I omitted to subscribe my name to one I sent to you, and if this is the case, this letter supplies the deficiency.

“ I am, dear sir,

“ Yours truly,

“ N. BROWN.”

“ To T. Jones, Esq.”

“ Dingleton Dale, April 28th, 1881.

“ DEAR SIR,

“ Yours, dated the 25th instant, but written on the 26th—if your note of the 27th is accurate—has reached me. Your perusal of the correspondence can scarcely have been a satisfactory occupation, inasmuch as it shows that every proposition you have made has been fully met and answered; it shows that I had a firm belief I possessed my own dog, and that I was not to be hectored out of it until I was satisfied to the contrary; and it also shows that I went to considerable trouble to find out

the truth, and immediately I did find it, I at once advised you of the fact. Therefore, your opinion as to my ‘astonishing stubbornness’ is uncalled-for, and I pass it by for what it is worth. Your explanation of your statement in my drawing-room being the result of the members of ‘my family all speaking at once,’ is just as polite as it is true.

“Your impression that I told you I had *not* communicated with the police is as groundless as other impressions on your mind (apparently), if I may judge from your statements on paper, and which I have had to contradict, and you have let drop. As to ‘its being somewhat remarkable what the police officer did,’ or did not do, the fact remains, that I showed the dog to the officer, and nothing whatever was said about your dog, and that I can prove at any time. It would have been more remarkable if your dog *had been* mentioned, for you said yours was a Newfoundland dog, and the one in question was *not*. The same remark would apply to your notices, even if I had seen them, which I certainly *did not*. As to the ‘booking office,’ it might have occurred to you, and probably did, that *I* was not likely to see the notice *there*.

“As to ‘the dog evincing no desire to return to

my house,' and the comforting inference you apparently draw from that fact, you probably know that he had had no opportunity to show such desire when your letter was written ; but, however that may be, the poor brute had escaped from your place yesterday morning, and at 9.30 tried hard and repeatedly to gain admission to my premises. Thus you will perceive it was somewhat premature to congratulate yourself on that point ; indeed, it is pretty conclusive that if the future ownership could be decided by the dog himself, your chance of possessing him for any length of time would be remote indeed.

“The gamekeeper’s statement as to a ‘thoroughbred retriever’ I gave you as I received it, and you are welcome to make what you like of it. I would not pretend to dispute your dictum on the subject, still less that of ‘Mr. Youatt,’ whose work on ‘Horses’ only I have read.

“As to the condition of the dog, you know, and you will remember your son said, how greatly the dog had improved, a remark which you endorsed ; and how you can reasonably refuse to pay for his keep, under the circumstances, it is difficult to conceive. However, the insignificant sum in question is not worth further controversy, and indeed, you are evidently becoming conscious that the subject

is exhausted, for you eke out your last letter by criticism as to the date of my last, and on a 'remarkable grammatical error' at the *commencement* of the correspondence; but critics should at least be accurate themselves, and your saying that my last was written on Wednesday (20th), when it was clearly a reply to yours of the 21st, and was evidently written on the day I sent the dog to your residence (22nd), is at least as remarkable as the blunders of the youth who made the grammatical error referred to—a blunder which may well be pardoned, when it is remembered that an older head has made errors quite as remarkable—I refer to yours of the 21st, apparently written by yourself, in which you say in effect that from January 24th to April 21st is four months; and again, that twelve times 2s. 9d. is £1 12s. I noticed the errors at the time, but certainly should not have thought of drawing your attention to them.

“I am, dear sir, yours truly,

“T. JONES.

“N. Brown, Esq.”

Mr. Jones fondly hoped he had disposed of his adversary, but he little knew Mr. Brown, who undauntedly returned to the charge.

“30th April, 1881.

“DEAR SIR,

“I am in receipt of your favour of yesterday’s date, in which you draw my attention to a theory of yours that my letter, dated the 25th instant, might have been written on the 26th. The date my letter bears is correct ; but this is not the case with regard to the statement you make that your letter dated the 21st instant was written on that day, for I have it from you in writing ; ‘The dog herewith. I write you to-day. Friday morning, 22/4/81.’ This is on a par with many other of your statements ; indeed, you should have a better memory.

“The remark in your letter concerning an answer you say I gave in your drawing-room, and your comments on my reply, are worthy of you ; for you, in your letter dated the 21st instant, furnished me with the information that your family did all speak at once.

“You may remember that you called your dog a ‘thorough-bred retriever’—mine is not of that designation ; but you were very proud of it, and say you recognised it as yours. I note you now call the animal a ‘poor brute,’ probably because I have caused you to cease to possess him. The old

tale about the ‘fox and the grapes’ may apply to you.

“I should have thought you would have seen notices posted at the station, near which you live; and your denial that you saw my notice surprises me. However, I accept your denial at its value.

“You say my dog has had no opportunity to show a desire to return to your house—a wanton and reckless statement. The dog has gone out every day, and has passed your house with me many times, without apparently intending or desiring to see you. I think your evidence, that the ‘poor brute’ tried repeatedly to gain admission to your premises, must be another inaccuracy. I hear that he did visit your door one morning, but not with the intention of entering your premises. Can it be possible that you have taken another dog for Don? If so, every ‘thoroughbred retriever’ in the neighbourhood had better be carefully looked after.

“Don is now recovering his flesh; but I find he is suffering from worms—probably from improper feeding. I trust the knowledge you say you possess of horses exceeds that you have of dogs, although the former does not interest me.

“My son remembers saying that Don had grown

--not improved. Young dogs will grow in four months.

“Your evasion of my proposal to refer the question of keep, &c. (which you now evince a desire to waive), to a third person, is evidence that you are aware of the hopelessness of your contention. It is on a par with your refusal to let my friends see my dog when in your possession.

“I really fear for the future of the youth who you say acts as your scribe. His mind will certainly be perverted if he be compelled to continually indite statements which he knows to be other than true. Your correspondence from beginning to end abounds with such statements, and I must ask you to excuse my replying to them *seriatim*, although you do call me to account for not doing so.

“Respecting your trivial remark as to the time you had my dog—I took the time from you. If you will add a top to the figure you take to be 2, it will make it 3, though possibly I may be awarded a larger sum than £1 13s., or £1 12s., as you read, should you agree to refer this money question to a third person.

“In your last letter some words are omitted, others incomplete, thus rendering the sentences to

which they refer somewhat obscure ; this, however, may not be your copyist's fault.

“ I am, dear sir,

“ Yours truly,

“ N. BROWN.”

“ He will not like that much, I fancy,” said Mr. Brown, as he folded up the epistle. “ I wonder what will happen now.”

It is always the unexpected, we know, which happens—and what happened then was certainly what Mr. Brown had never anticipated.

Mr. Jones returned the letter. A memorandum in Mr. Brown's handwriting on the outside of the envelope fully explains what occurred :

“ *This letter was returned by hand to Eglantine Lodge, apparently unopened, on Monday, 2nd May ; but a close examination leads me to suppose that it had been opened before returning it. Evidently T. J. abandons his unrighteous claim.*”

Mr. Jones had. Weary of the fight with his adversary, it is possible he might, for very peace' sake, have paid Mr. Brown's demand for “ loss of society,” had that vivacious gentleman continued to press it.

But he too was open to the remonstrances of common sense. When his friends, who greatly enjoyed the fun, pressed him to take proceedings, he answered, with a laughing twinkle in his eyes,

“No, no; even if I hunted him into the County Court, I should never get a penny. Remember there is a saying: ‘You cannot take the shirt off a naked man.’ The best thing to do with a fellow like that is to treat him with sovereign contempt.”

Which Mr. Brown accordingly did, to his own great satisfaction, and the extreme content of Mr. Jones.

Thus the storm—about nothing—in a tea-cup subsided.

Mr. Brown finds fresh beauties and virtues in “the varmint,” Sunday by Sunday. Jack never has been heard of since he started in pursuit of that rabbit in Richmond Park. He may be pursuing it there still. Sinbad, whom an accomplished dog-stealer might strive in vain to seduce from his allegiance, one day finding the back gate of Honeysuckle Cottage open, ventured into the yard to see whether Jack had left any available property behind which could be appropriated, but

Mr. Jones, senior, interrupting him in his researches, Sinbad was seen flying from the premises as if ridden by an imp and pursued by a thousand demons.

THE END.



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